

IDYLLS OF GREECE

HOWARD V. SUTHERLAND



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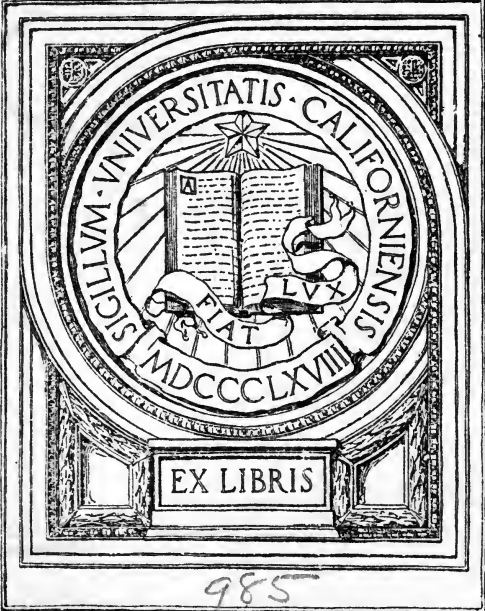


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IDYLLS OF GREECE

IDYLLS OF GREECE

(Third Series)

BY
HOWARD V. SUTHERLAND

The stars have been my loves; and I have lain
With sighing winds and won their confidence.



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CONTENTS

	PAGE
IDAS AND MARPESSA	3
RHODANTHE	53
SAPPHO AND PHAON	101
ŒNONE	151



IDAS AND MARPESSA



IDAS AND MARPESSA

NOW, once again, with lute of ivory
And lower'd eyes, I sing the olden tales
Of olden loves, of lovers who were lured

In other days more beautiful than these
By chilly Death from earth's bright winsome-
ness ;

Who whisper now in his grey underworld
Of unforgotten kisses and vain sighs,
Of trembling hands that touch'd so tenderly
The dear, warm body in the Long Ago.
A little while and each of us must pass
Where these are waiting ; where no hornèd
moon,

Star-follow'd and benignant, pours o'er men
Her constant pity ; where no sun looks down
And mocks endeavor. In eternal hush
There meet the old-time lovers, and the air

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Is fragrant with their whisper'd memories,
With tales of Youth's pure passion and its
dreams.

And though men face with set and steely eyes
To-day's sheer glitter and inconsequence,
Or laugh despite its thunder, ye that knew
A dear one's presence, and have bent at dusk
Above her spirit's beauty, know full well
What lingers like the echoes of hush'd harps
As Age's shadow nears us. Iron men,
And they that weaken in adversity,
Are loved alike; though Death be pitiless,
Love eyes us with compassion. Therefore he—
Blind to our faults but never to our charms—
Remember'd is as each of us goes down
Whence naught arises; therefore, from the din
Of constant battle turning, here and there
A few there are who deem a holy thing
The laurell'd Past; who fain would dream again
As others dream'd. The sickle laid aside,
I bind for them this sheaf of faint-heard song,
And leave it standing in the fields of Time
Till song and singer be alike forgot.

A GOLDEN thing is friendship; holy is
That love whose other name is constancy.
Idas, the friend of Jason, found at last
In fair Marpessa peace, as most men find,

IDAS AND MARPESSA

Or soon or late, serene companionship
In one whose lips hint more than may be told.
For woman's love, since erst the world began,
Is oft unutter'd; but like yonder blue
That swathes the rugged tops of solemn hills,
Proclaims itself by silence, by a glance
That lies like benediction on the soul.
The melody unheard, the airy song
Suggested by the silence, and the peace
Behind the moveless azure—these suggest
The love that bides behind a woman's lips.
For even when those lips proclaim their love,
And when her eyes shine promise, of her soul
Her love is silent fragrance, as its scent
The soul is of the love-desiring rose.
In olden days the tellers of these tales,
Who wove their fancies from the glinting webs
The gods blew earthward, or of memories
Robb'd the hush'd Past, have told how Idas won
The daughter of Evènus, racing him
With hot-soled feet; and how he conquer'd him;
And how the hoary runner plunged to death
Within the waters that assumed his name
And hid his body. But the victor claim'd
Her hand as prize and led her, happy-eyed,
From harsh Ætolia, where her grace was lost,
To his bright valleys in Messenia.
And she, Marpessa, in her husband found

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Her girlhood's dream, and was most satisfied
To worship and be worship'd. In the dawn
She rose betimes to see him seek the woods
Before the deer were stirring; long ere noon,
Her household duties over, for her lord
She watch'd without the bronzen latticed gates
To lead him to their palace; and when came
The softly-breathing Night with eyes of dream,
She raised her lips to him so brave and clean,
Who faced the stars as he had faced the sea.
Now, thinking back, it seems that in their woods
My lonely spirit saw them; hand in hand,
Serene in silence, or with burning lips
Vowing their heart's indifference to time,
Their love and their eternal constancy.
Youth's roses had departed from her cheeks;
His locks were not so brown as when the waves
Flung their pure mist upon them; yet the gods
Still number'd them with lovely things, with all
That laugh'd and look'd not backward, nor
surmised

The night behind the promise of the day.
And deeming each the other beautiful
They both were young; for Age no finger lays
On her who's loved; and he whose lips receive
A heart's impassion'd murmurs, fears no more
The whisper'd warning from the lips of Death.
And even now she bade him weave for her

IDAS AND MARPESSA

In such embroidery as color'd words
Can hang upon the silence, all the tale
Of Jason and his heroes ; how the sea
Curl'd angrily around them, while the wind
Shrill'd through its teeth its heritage of hate ;
He told her of the heroes ; and at last
Of dark Medea, who had charm'd his lord,
Or so the heroes said, and married him.
And then he told her how the land was full
Of awful mutterings of unseen mouths
That said her hands were bloody. Thus he told
The day's new gossip much as we to-day
May gossip in the twilight. Now, as then,
The idlest tale, if one but whisper it,
Finds ears to give it welcome ; now, as then,
The wind is bearer of the distant deed
And Truth is ever that which is untold.

AND when she spoke it was of other things
That dearer seem'd to him than tales of
war.

For she a woman was, and dream'd again
Of that first night when o'er her blessed hand
He bent and said he loved and worship'd her.
That eve they linger'd by a marble fane
Whose stilly whiteness fill'd their hearts with
peace,

And watch'd the Dusk spread purple coverlets

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Upon the mountains' summits. On the woods
Lay darker mantles, and the vales were black
With sleep that woo'd the cattle and the flowers.
They spoke no word, but watch'd with wonder-
ment

The many changes, knowing they were one
With stars and glory; one with loveliness,
With hills and trees and all that graced the
vales.

Then, in her father's garden, he and she
That summer's night had wander'd. Far away
The heavy hills now slumber'd; in the skies
The stars were gather'd, moving solemnly
Their order'd ways, expectant of the moon.
And now was heard the twitter of a bird,
And then a cricket's protest, else so still
The air about them that he caught the wind's
Soft whisper in her tresses; and the while
She look'd away, his love o'erpower'd him
And he had touch'd those tresses with his lips.
But she was dreaming then of—Ah! who knows?
Perhaps of him. Perhaps unknown to him
She sensed his adoration, as the flower
May sense at noon the pity of the dusk.
Perhaps, although she never felt that kiss,
Night's stilly voices whisper'd: "Thou art
loved!";
Perhaps the stars proclaim'd it, or the wind,

IDAS AND MARPESSA

The hopeless wind, whose love is long lament.
Perhaps she thought of whispers and of sighs,
Of cool-cheek'd roses brought on golden morns
With silv'ry words of greeting. Ah! who
 knows?

And wand'ring home beneath the risen moon
She lean'd to him a little, and his arm
Had almost dared to hold her prisoner.
But when at last they reach'd the shadow'd
 porch,

By scented creepers shelter'd from the world,
Again love master'd him and, ere she knew,
His lips had seal'd his secret on her hands.
And though his eyes were hidden now from
 her,

And though his voice was silent, she was 'ware
That this no passion was, no youthful heat
To pass ere morning with the icy moon
And all her chaste attendants. This was love,
That grows in silence, love that worship is;
Whose constant flame burns constantly above
Life's grey illusion, and essays to light
The hopeless highways through the realms of
 Death.

And then with face uplifted, that his eyes
Might seek her own eyes' solace, he had told
His love for her, and how, as in a net
The tangled bird may flutter, now his heart

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Was caught for ever by that guileless charm
With which the gods had graced her. He was
one

Who lived for action; and his speech was bare
As winter's dreamless branches; but a sheen
Encircled him that evening, and his words
Seem'd golden like the heart-song of a bird
That sings its joyous message in the sun.
And he had won her, though the moon was gone
Before, all lily-like, she droop'd to him
And kiss'd his forehead, saying she was his;
And kiss'd again, as if she knew that now
The gods would eye them through unkindly
lids

And wreck the flimsy fabric of their dream.
For they that sit in judgment love us not
Who dwell in Time, imprison'd, till we seek
The silence and the shadow. From their seats
They watch our vain endeavor, hear our sighs,
And note the eager groping of our hands
To hands that tremble uswards; through the
dusk

Our whispers rise and vanish, and they hear,
And hollow laughter thins the lips of them.
For human loves are holy; our desire
Outflames their awful splendor; and although
They scorn us, who are hostages of Death,
They envy us, and hate us for our dreams.

IDAS AND MARPESSA

AND so the while they linger'd in the
woods,

And Idas bade her whisper, to her love
Marpessa told that story. And it seem'd
Each time he heard it, it was ever new,
Or, like a jewel held against the sun,
Took unknown beauties to it. Through the
trees

Serenity beheld them, marvelling,
As Nature ever marvels at the fair,
At so much happiness in two so fond,
In two so pure and perfect. To the trees
They seem'd akin, and to the wind-swept hills
Array'd in joyous colors; to the birds,
Singing from hearts so cramm'd with happiness
They never can outpour it, they were things
Half unsubstantial, with the tiny blooms
That smiled their stilly message of delight.
And when her voice was silent, and the tale
Was ended, he would question: "Even now
I know not how I won thee, I, whose arms
Have fear'd to clasp thy beauty." And she
smiled

And bade him wonder. "While I live," she
said,

"My love must needs be silent. When I die
I'll whisper thee its secret, and thy heart
Shall strain against the barriers of death

IDYLLS OF GREECE

To bring me solace." And he bent to her,
And said: "I love thee, and would e'er abide
Within the folded pinions of thy soul,
At peace and happy. If thou ventur'est
Where ghosts await us ere I go with thee,
Thy love shall draw me thither; should I go,
I'll wait thy boat's still beaching, and assuage
Thy murmurs with the welcome of mine eyes."
"My love thou art," she whisper'd. "I am
thine.

Our day is at its morning; music fills
Our happy hearts as now the air is fill'd
With yon dear bird's impassion'd melody.
The noon shall follow with its sense of peace,
Then blessèd evening with its memories
And all the sweet companionship of stars.
I gaze untroubled down the aisles of Time,
Because thy love shall guard me." Then he
kiss'd

The hand that touch'd all-tenderly his hair.
"I only know I love thee," he replied.
"Thy words are music; let my silence be
The air that would contain them. Hark! the
bird

Has pity on my dumbness, and to thee
Would sing the benediction in my heart."
And then they listen'd, and the woods became
Their temple, and the bird its feather'd priest

IDAS AND MARPESSA

Whose wholesome adoration pleased the gods
And made the solemn eyes of them grow kind.
Then Idas press'd his dear one close to him.

"It loves," he said. "It loves, and therefore
sings.

But though I love, my worship must be mute,
My fond Marpessa, my belovèd wife."

And then, perhaps, she raised to his her lips
And saw, with closèd eyes, the olden dream
In all its purity. Oh! never say

That love is aught but holy. From the dark

We journey to the darkness; love, the while,

Enswathes us in its utter spotlessness

And makes of poor, imperfect instruments

Things worth the What's-to-follow. Love is
all.

FOR two swift years the gods look'd care-
lessly

On Idas and Marpessa. There were wars

'Twixt god and god, intrigues and jealousies

To hold their bright attention; otherwheres

Kings robed in purple, wearing crowns of gold,

Look'd at the stars perhaps too haughtily,


Or plann'd To-morrow's conquest; them the
gods

Smote silently and swiftly, laughing long

To see the pomp that follow'd them to death,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

As if they thought their banners or their plumes
Might alter Death's enorme solemnity,
Or hint: These once were kings. For two
 swift years
Those lovers, now long silent, dream'd their
 dreams.
They laugh'd together in the morning's cool
And raised their babes. And then the gods
 look'd down
And saw their fondness, and an arch'd surprise
Above their heavy eyes bode ill to them.

S when great birds, white-plumaged in
the foam
Of untrack'd seas from drowsiness
 awake,
And make the bright air brighter with the flash
Of light-tipp'd wings, so now the shining
 heavens
Wherein the gods gleam'd idly, seem'd awake
As, one by splendid one, they roused themselves.
Then moved among them a delightful boy,
The star-eyed Ganymedes, loved of Zeus,
Whose rounded limbs the winds kiss'd joyously
The while he slumber'd; in his hand he bore
A crystal goblet topp'd with fragrant foam,

IDAS AND MARPESSA

And touch'd each snowy shoulder. And the
 gods

Were glad to see his pretty artlessness
So drank and laugh'd, and, laughing, drank
 again.

And then on golden platters, finely wrought,
Most rich in pictures of heroic deeds
And loves now sung by singers and the stars,
The curl-brow'd boy to each reclining god
Took honey-sweet ambrosia; and they ate,
And thus renew'd their youth. And being fill'd
They look'd again to where the fair earth
 gleam'd

As gleams a crystal river when the sun
Pours its hot love upon it. Saying naught
They gazed thereon in rapture, much as we
May watch the thing from which still Beauty's
 breath

Has blown the grossness, asking of themselves
Why Zeus had made a toy so beautiful
For Time's dull tooth to gnaw at, and despoil.
Swiftly they saw with their all-seeing eyes
The mountains' majesty, the charm of vales,
The drowsy forest's beauty; from the woods
Their gaze turned slowly to the silv'ry streams
That wound through gay and flower-enamell'd
 meads

And laugh'd while Death allur'd them to the sea.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

They saw the city with its hordes of men
As blind and selfish as their sons to-day;
Amassing wealth beyond the needs of them,
Disputing vainly in their ignorance
Of things as far beyond them as the stars.
They laugh'd to see the soldier's martial stride,
The condescension of the sated lord,
Who smiled on worth and frown'd on poverty
While Death stood silently beside his seat
And eyed him with grave patience. In their
 hearts

They mock'd man's pride, and wish'd him bitterness.

They saw the hardy peasant at his task
Behind his straining oxen; on the hills
The piping boy with brown'd and sturdy
 limbs

Beside his sheep; and where the rocking sea
Responded to the wooing of the sun,
And gleam'd its pleasure, bearded fishermen
Whose eyes roved landward where their loved
 ones were.

They saw the priests perform the sacrifice
On ancient altars hewn from gleaming stone,
While white-robed vestals watch'd the sacred
 flames

And sang the solemn pæans; in the fields
They saw the women bent above the grapes.

IDAS AND MARPESSA

The tranquil kine amused them, for they
thought

Of restless Io's heavy punishment ;

And when a deer would raise its antler'd head,

Or the meek rabbit signal its affright

With lifted ears alert to every sound,

Their bright eyes widen'd as they hoped to see

A shepherd's wooing of a willing nymph.

And loud they laugh'd to hear what vows he
made

Of lasting faith, or swore to cherish her

Despite her fault ; for well the wise gods knew

The bees are fond while flowers are yet to
win,

But soon forget the flower that is despoil'd.

APART from all the rest, Apollo sat,

But eyed the earth as idly. In his hair

Such glory linger'd that his face was bright

As is the sun itself, and yet his eyes

Were blacker than the gloom of wintry skies

Ere stars adventure from their hiding place.

One hand lay heavy on his marbled knee

As, forward bent, his gaze pierced fearlessly

The gulfs of blue ; the other held the lyre

With which at times he charm'd his grave com-
peers

By dream-evoking music, strains as sad

IDYLLS OF GREECE

As Day's bright scorn or Night's sweet constancy.

But now, though Zeus oft eyed him lovingly
As if in supplication, at his side

The lyre was mute; for where the trees enclosed
A moveless pool on that revolving sphere
Where dreams are born that Fate may mock at
them,

He saw—Marpessa. And the joy in him
Became extinguish'd like a blown-out light
Because, all-suddenly, he longed for her,

Who seem'd a thing of whitest ivory
Within an em'rald casket; like a flame

His joy leap'd up and suddenly went out
And left his huge heart empty, as to-day

Our little joy as suddenly is gone

As is the fragrance of the fated rose.

But heedless of the ever-burning gaze

That flamed above her movements, in the
pool

Marpessa bathed, her black hair having bound
About her brows all-tightly. By the reeds

Her garments lay, and though they snowy were
Yet she was whiter, for her purity

Herself was, as its pallor is the moon,

And though a wife yet was she innocent.

The pretty deer, with large and lustrous eyes

And hesitating hoofs, came from the trees

IDAS AND MARPESSA

And nosed the glinting water, eyeing her
As though she were a thing of woods and
hills,

A thing that knew and loved them; and anon,
When they had sensed the loveliness of her
And sipp'd their fill, they turn'd their heads
from her

And shyly sought the forest's shade again.
The birds, attired in brilliant liveries,
Consider'd her a sister, look'd at her,
And sang while looking; then, with wetted
wings,

Flew to their mates and woke the scented peace
With twitter'd gossip, till these others sought
The little pool that held the wonder-one.

Then, as he gazed, their swiftly-moving wings
Seem'd brighter to Apollo than the skies

When sunset tints them; and he envied them
Their fondness for Marpessa. From his seat
He tower'd as suddenly as does the flame

The winds have tortured; and had sought her
then,

While yet his heart's Titanic passion-throb
Paled his bright face. But Zeus, the Father,
call'd,

And set him to a task that hinder'd him.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

AND once again, that same task being done,
He peer'd from out the shelter of a cloud
And saw Marpessa. It was Even now,
And they that mock the destinies of men
Sat solemnly together, knee by knee,
Beneath grave Zeus and his all-jealous spouse.
And while they whisper'd of the day to come,
The sad-eyed Dusk, with dreams in either hand,
Stepp'd from their midst and sought the weary
earth.

Before the gentle sorrow of her face
The light withdrew, to men whom Sleep still
bless'd

Bearing the day's illusion, and the hope
For that which, being granted, proves but vain.
And while he gazed upon the half-hush'd woods,
Where now the trees in blessèd stillness
Exhaled their souls, all-grateful for the day,
From out their gardens to the greater peace
Marpessa came, and Idas. Lover-like,
His arm was still about her; and again
He charm'd her with the story of their love
In days that now seem'd days of golden dream.
And though so oft the story he had told,
Yet seem'd it ever new. In wonderment
She walk'd beside him, raising trustingly
Her eyes to his when he a deed recall'd
That brought the Past back, and its memories.

IDAS AND MARPESSA

Above their heads, where arch'd the heavy
boughs,

The birds cheep'd faintly, knowing that the
night

Was drawing nigh, and soon the hateful owl
Would hoot its feud against all feather'd things
And furry creatures, while the heartless moon
Cross'd regally the heavens. Amid the leaves
In blest security they hid their heads
Beneath their wings, and then the woods were
still

As if with expectation. And the while
The darkness thicken'd, by a well-known path
The lovers sought a bower beloved of them,
And whisper'd there, as if the birds might hear,
About their love that still so wondrous seem'd.
Forgetting naught they lived their dream
again—

Their first sweet stammer'd vows; her first shy
kiss

When, so it seem'd, the gods had turn'd aside
In envy of a girl's pure tenderness;
The silence that was music; and the calm
That slowly flamed to passion—Ah! if thou
Whose lids now droop above this halting line
Hast loved as they loved, let thy mem'ry paint
That perfect picture for thee. Having loved
Thou knowest all things perfect; one thou art

IDYLLS OF GREECE

With Idas or Marpessa. Kingdoms change,
Stars wane and mountains vanish; love alone
Remains To-day what Yesterday it was,
And makes us kin to all that's turn'd to dust.

AND while the Night enswathed the sleep-
ing earth,
Asserting its dominion over men
Whose hearts were joyous, men whose hearts
were sad,
Where dream'd the gods, the ever-deathless
ones,
It darken'd too. Each splendid star now faced
Its sister orb in silv'ry sympathy
And left the high air widow'd; but there glow'd
Where sat the gods, a steely after-light
In luminous suggestion, such as woos
The crystal fringes of the rolling sphere
Where white-furr'd bear tread heavily the snow.
The winds stroked rhymeless music from their
harps,
Intoning solemnly their airy chant
In praise of Zeus. "Supremest! Thunderer!
Whose glance is as the lightning; thou whose
breath
Titanic cedars bends submissively,
Heaps sea on sea, extinguishes the stars!
Gather'd from far we kneel and worship thee

IDAS AND MARPESSA

In wild, unfetter'd music. We have seen
Man's pitiful endeavors, deeds and dreams
Beneath thy notice. Death makes mock of
them,

Whose little life is spent ere thou and thine
Are conscious of their being. Thee we praise,
Who art alone enduring; by whose will
We wake from nothing, by whose will we die."
But Zeus, with sad, impenetrable eyes,
Gazed into space, well-knowing that at last
Creator and created are as one—

Are doom'd as is the sunset's holy glow,
Are vain as are the hopes of yesterday.
And then the gods that sat at Zeus's feet
With half-hush'd voices answer'd: "Thou art
he

Whose eyes have dream'd all things of consequence.

Before it came, thou knewest of To-day
And Destiny's decrees. We bend to thee
Who art the Father." And again the winds
Intoned their praise: "Thou only canst out-
stare

The eyes of Time. Death lays no hands on
thee;

But crams his grey and echoless abode
With all that thou createst. Thou art he
To whom they wildly clamor ere they tread

IDYLLS OF GREECE

The way that leads to silence and despair.”
Then once again the gods’ deep murmurs voiced
Their answ’ring adoration; but the eyes
Of Zeus were fix’d and moody. So the rock,
Unmindful of the passion of the sea,
Awaits its end; it scorns the sun’s caress,
The wind’s advances and the lightning’s hate.

AND now the heights were silent. Cloud on
cloud,
With fleecy shoulders leaning each to each,
Took for the night their stations, while the
winds
Remain’d without and roam’d, disconsolate,
The starry highways. One by splendid one
The gods lay down to wait Aurora’s call
To see the dawnburst, note with ecstasy
The modest flower’s unfolding, and delight
In that first note with which the happy bird
Heralds the day and all its promises.
Austerely silent, at the feet of Zeus
They fell asleep, or gazed through half-closed
eyes
Upon the face that brooded over them.
And once again, like huge and moveless birds,
The watchers of the tragedies of men
Lay couch’d amid the cloud-mass stillily;
Prepared to dream of flights against the sun,

IDAS AND MARPESSA

Enormous circlings to the pleasant earth
Or swift descents through endless gulfs of
space.

But one was wakeful, one who lay apart
And strove to pierce with melancholy gaze
The heedless clouds—Apollo. At his side
His lyre still idle lay. No breathless tones
Lured fancies to the eyes of them that slept,
Or woke the others' musings. By himself
He lay and suffer'd, anxious for the dawn
That he might see Marpessa, and, ere night,
Win her from Idas and the things she loved.



HE morning dawn'd, a morn of joyous-
ness,

Of blue, bright skies; a morn of wonder-
ment

So breathless that the ever-trilling lark
Outsung itself while mounting, flight by flight,
To where all space seem'd thirsty for its
song.

A first, faint breeze, fore-runner of the winds
That soon would follow, from the Caves of Pearl
Where homed the plaintive echoes of the deep
Came slowly forth, and fill'd the airy aisles
With sea-sweet fragrance. As the trees awoke

IDYLLS OF GREECE

They trembled slightly, and the whisp'ring
leaves

Greeted each other in the speech that is
More delicate than music. Moveless then,
Like virgins at the hour of sacrifice,
They stood and waited till with ruder hands
The winds should touch them, sway them to and
fro

In wildest dance, and leave them suddenly
To mourn their stripp'd and tatter'd dra-
peries.

And while a silence still possess'd the air
Save for the dwindling cadence of the lark,
To where the steps led downward Idas came
From out the palace with his shaggy hounds.
Marpessa follow'd with his trusted spear
And bow and arrows; but her dragging feet
And smileless lips betoken'd she was sad
This golden morning; and had kept him there
To hear the first sweet prattle of their babes
Had he not seem'd so eager for the chase.
But when she laid his weapons at his feet,
And raised to his the question of her eyes,
He placed his arm about her, and his touch
Made her forget, who was so solely his.
“ Nay, fear not, wife,” he said. “ Ere noon is
come

The hounds shall bay before the welcome gates,

IDAS AND MARPESSA

And call thee forth to greet me. Thou shalt
see

My shoulders hid beneath the hugest skin
That made a bear seem fearful; but thy feet
This very night, when o'er thy heavy lids
Sleep draws the velvet solace of his plumes,
Shall tread it as thou goest to thy couch
To dream of him who loves thee." "Ah," said
she,

"Who goes away is ever free of care;
Who stays is heavy-hearted. Thou and I
Are one, my husband; when thou leavest me,
Though the blest sunshine trembles in my hair,
My heart becomes the darksome lair of fear.
I love thee, Idas." "And I love thee, too,"
Her husband answer'd. "I have thought of
thee

When, call'd in Greece's service, I have dared
The swift, unerring dart of bitter Death.
Thy love has kept me scathless, and thy voice
Has whisper'd me in hours of loneliness
Such words as gave me courage. I have lived
Since first I loved thee; and I love thee still,
And fain would live to win for thee and mine
Fresh honor and more glory. When I go
To fight for Greece, thou sayest not a word;
Yet now I go to bring thee——" Then he
laugh'd

IDYLLS OF GREECE

And stroked the worry from her low, cool brow ;
Then bade her note how eager were the hounds
To prove their mettle. And she clung to him
And look'd at him in silence. Ah! who knows
The thoughts behind a woman's trustful eyes,
Or senses all she suffers? Through the years
We take without a question all she gives,
But never know her. Infancy and age
Alike depend upon her; in his prime
Man strides alone to learn his destiny;
He crowns himself whenever he succeeds,
But turns to her for comfort when he fails.
So Idas laugh'd and kiss'd her. "Smile on
me,"

He said at last, his weapons in his hand;
"That when I venture where the woods are
dark

Thine eyes shall light me, and the memory
Of thy sweet face may hearten me against
What odds may wait me in the monster's cave."
And while the eager dogs leap'd noisily,
Or whined with noses pointed to the woods,
She kiss'd his forehead; and he strode away,
The dogs beside him watchful of his eye
And silent now as he was. And while yet
Marpessa's hands were clasp'd against her
heart,

He pass'd within the menace of the woods.

IDAS AND MARPESSA

AND while her darlings slept, two pretty
babes,

All pink and white and smiles and innocence,
To that same pool beyond the garden's walls
Marpessa went, unfearing. Now the woods
Were bright with promise, for the tallest trees
Beheld the first swift lances of the sun
Glint in the east, and drive in front of them
The last doom'd line of hesitating grey.
But still the grass, from which her sandals
brush'd

Uncounted dewdrops mirroring the world,
Was cool in shadow, and the leaves were wet
As if the fleeing Night had wept o'er them.
And while she sped beneath the whisp'ring trees,
From glade to glade where now the startled
hare

Look'd hurriedly upon her, and was gone,
She thought of Idas. Was it years ago
He woo'd and won her? Or but yester-morn
She said she loved him? For it seem'd her love
Was like the light, the golden light of day,
That grew each moment stronger; scarce she
knew

How much she loved him. Ah! the gentle trees
That bent above the soil in sympathy
Would know her grief; and so she raised to
them

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Her pleading hands; and though they silent
were,

She sensed their pity and was comforted.

But ere she came to where the shaded pool

Invited with its stillness, in her path

Stood one so splendid that the sun itself

Could make his face no brighter. Curling
locks,

That gleam'd above a forehead marble-pale,

Caught the descending glory, but his eyes

Were dark with mystery, black yet terrible

As passion is, that hungers for the thing

Beyond the fever'd reaching of its hand.

But though his face was flame, the form of him

So perfect was, so chastely wonderful,

That, awed to silence and astonishment,

Marpessa eyed him as a moment's dream,

Half-fearing he might vanish. Then a smile

Caress'd his lips, a smile so luminous

That glory seem'd to have its home in him,

And he was light itself—light radiant

In, of all forms, the form most beautiful.

Now, seeing he had charm'd her, as the flame

Ensnares the soft-wing'd priestess of the dark,

He spoke. "Marpessa!" Just the name of
her.

But, oh! his voice was as the voice of one

Who deems his love for evermore removed

IDAS AND MARPESSA

Beyond the bridgeless gulfs of hopeless death,
Beyond all winning. As the echoes died
The silence seem'd suggestive of a woe,
So heavily it lay upon the soul
Of her that listen'd. And the hand of her,
While still she faced him with untroubled eyes,
Was slowly lifted to her drooping lips
As if in question. But, before she spoke,
Again Apollo cried that airy name,
Again it echo'd till the glade was fill'd.
"Marpessa!" Oh! the tenderness of it.
And then he held his hand outstretch'd to her
And look'd his longing; but as yet she thought
She dream'd by daylight, and the thing would
pass

As all dreams pass, however beautiful.
And still his beauty charm'd her, and, anon,
The air contain'd her hesitating hand
And heard her whisper: "Art thou Love itself,
Or Beauty's spirit? Or art thou a man,
And made of that same perishable stuff
That waits for death to ease it of its pain?
Or do I dream and think thou gleamest there,
While naught's around me save the list'ning
trees

And shifting sunlight? If a man thou art,
Whence comest thou? What hero-bearing land
May claim thy service, and what mother's eyes

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Have joy'd above thy beauty? " Then in tones
That thrill'd at times the purest silences
Of highest heaven, Apollo answer'd her :
" Man am I not, nor subject unto death ;
But number'd am with those whose gaze serene
Watches the world from heights of amethyst
Where sits my father. I am he that hymns
The song of morning, and, when even's torch
Reddens the west, I sing the requiem
That mourns the sun's down-going. I am he
To whom the Muses listen, and the stars
Echo the songs that tremble from my lips.
My mother was Latona." While he spoke,
A startled cry escaped Marpessa's lips
As, fearing now his presence, she essay'd
To ease her eyes in darkness with her hand.
And still was silent. " Now thou knowest me,"
The god continued, and his voice was soft
As that of waves on sands of drowsy isles.
" On sapphire morns of golden joyousness
Thy lips have sung my praises ; thou hast seen
The curling incense widen in its rise
To circle me with fragrance. Drop thy hands
That I may see the beauty of thine eyes,
O fair Marpessa !" Then she look'd at him,
Unconscious of his purpose. " Brightest
god,"
She whisper'd faintly as she lean'd to him ;

IDAS AND MARPESSA

"Thou callest me Marpessa. What am I
That thou, in accents sweeter than the wind
On eves of pearl, shouldst call me by my name?
I am but mortal, and no more to thee
Than the doom'd flower that perishes with day."
And then he open'd wide his gleaming arms
And look'd at her, as he had often look'd
On other beauties willing to be won;
And once again the forest heard him sigh:
"Marpessa! fair Marpessa!" Then at last
She sensed his love, and straightway shrank
from him

As from a thing unclean and dangerous.
But he continued with a swifter speech
To tell his passion. "Ah! thou knowest now
Why thus I cry 'Marpessa'! As I gazed
From heaven's bright heights and saw thee, in
my heart

Love's sudden torch was lighted. Thee I love.
Unearthly splendors woo me when I pass
Those ways serene; the nymphs' white loveliness
Awaits me where the fern nods dreamily
Its acquiescence to the wooing wind.
But thou art fairer than the whitest nymph
That trembles in the moonlight. I have seen
Thy fated beauty, and I yearn for thee
As one in hell may hunger for the light."
But closer now she drew her purple robe

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Across her breast. "Thou lovest hopelessly,
O flame-bright god," she said. "My love is his
Who won me from my father, who has spun
His golden dreams about me till to him
I seem as lovely as the brightest star.
Two babes remind us of our mating time,
Of days when yet we whisper'd each to each
The pretty nothings that to lovers are
More dear than all the wisdom of the years.
And now that we are cooler, side by side
We go our way, believing in the gods
And one another, fearless of the end."
But now Apollo near'd her. "Thee and thine
One end awaits, Marpessa. Night by night
The silent Boatman bears to silent shores
The voiceless ghosts of lovers such as ye.
My loves become immortal. Time nor Change
Can touch those favor'd of the deathless gods.
If thou wilt love me thou shalt dwell with me
In everlasting splendor, and be praised
By men yet formless in the Future's womb."
But now Marpessa laugh'd. "Where Idas
goes,
My little ones must follow," she replied.
"Shall I forsake them in that bitter place,
And leave them lonely? Could a poet's song
Make shame less shameful? Oh! thou knowest
not,

IDAS AND MARPESSA

Bright god of morning, of the heart that is
A wife's and mother's. Could I stay with thee
And hear thee singing while mine own were
crouch'd

In misty hell? And would thy kisses make
My sorrow for their desolation less?
Supreme art thou and very beautiful;
But though thy lips have quiver'd with the song
That thrills the holy cedars, in thy heart
Abides no love, nor aught of tenderness
If thus thou judgest women." And again
She laugh'd to think how Idas worship'd her,
And how she loved him. But, while yet she
laugh'd,


Apollo seized her. "Thou art mine," he cried,
And press'd his burning lips upon her own.
"Thy constancy shall vanish as the dew
Forsakes its love, the pallid asphodel,
When sunbeams woo it. When I sing to thee
Thy pulse shall quicken; when my heart shall
beat

Above thine own, thine eyes shall read in mine
Such dreams as force forgetfulness of all
Thy former dreamings. Thou shalt love me
yet.

Thy hand shall yet caress me, and thy lips
Shall cling to mine until all space shall seem
Too tiny for our swooning." And while yet

IDYLLS OF GREECE

The forest echo'd with her bitter cry,
And all grew dark around her, in his arms
Apollo bore his burden from the glade.

 IS listless dogs behind him, through the
woods
Strode Idas, singing. In a gloomy spot,
Where never satyr sprawl'd beneath the trees
Or teasing fauns dismay'd the restive deer,
The lip-raised bear had met him. Silently
They faced each other, and the waiting dogs
Whined to attack their ancient enemy.
Then from his bow the hunter shot a shaft
That whizz'd its song of death, and in the throat
Of it, the hunted, pitilessly lodged.
And while the brown brute lunged to challenge
them,
The dogs sprang forward; but the bear was
quick,
And smote with thick and danger-dealing paws
Its rash tormentors. One as suddenly
Yelp'd and was dead; and then a second shaft,
By Idas sped from his complaining bow,
Smote the huge fury in its shaggy breast.
And now it gave no heed to snapping jaws,
But, dripping blood from not ignoble wounds,

IDAS AND MARPESSA

O'erlook'd the baser things and sought the man,
Its equal in the forest. With a roar
That cow'd the dogs, the bear, uprear'd and
straight,

Confronted Idas. But the spear was poised,
The spear long envied of the Argonauts,
And, loosed, it travell'd like a thunderbolt
And smote the bear and drove him back again.
Then through the vast and bloody cavity
Pale Death rush'd in and chill'd its mighty
heart,

And closed its angry eyes against the woods.
And ere the hearten'd dogs could worry it
The noble beast crash'd down, and was as still
As is the fell'd tree, slaughter'd in its prime.

BUT when he reach'd his palace, and had cast
His shoulder's burden on the gleaming
stairs,

Marpessa did not greet him. Through the
halls

He strode and call'd her, but his children's cries
Apprised him she was absent. Then of them
That eyed him mutely, faithful servitors
Still proud to serve, he ask'd in curtest speech
If one had seen her. But they still were dumb
And shook their heads while looking on the
ground.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

And though they search'd the palace, cried her
name

And sought the gardens over, not a sign
Of lost Marpessa brought the seekers joy.
But when, at fault, they turn'd to pray the gods
Reveal their secret; and with troubled eyes
Their master follow'd them, a blind old hound
Much favor'd of Marpessa bay'd the woods;
And ever sniffing as she cross'd the grass
Went slowly forward, baying as she went.
Then Idas knew; and shouting to the slaves
To guard his children as they would their lives,
He grasp'd his spear and follow'd. Yard by
yard

The hound went on, while Idas spoke to her,
Impatient, yet all-grateful for her aid.
And on and on, beneath the self-same pines
That saw on other days such happenings
As he might find delight in; through such glades
Where Dian heard her moon-enamored maids
Relate the day's adventures; how the deer
Escaped their arrows, or a drowsy herd
Gazed at their limbs with unbelieving eyes
And fell asleep again. But Idas' thoughts
Were fix'd on his Marpessa, and his gaze
Was strain'd upon the distance. Bush and tree
Seem'd fraught with menace to the one he loved,
And therefore hateful; so he hurried on

IDAS AND MARPESSA

Behind the hound, and cheer'd her with his
voice.

And once she whined, and turn'd, then turn'd
again

And bay'd the louder; for her scent was keen
Although her eyes were useless. Overhead
The sun had cross'd the midline of the sky,
And slanting beams now fill'd the drowsy woods
With afternoon's still glory; bush and tree
Alike seem'd golden, and a golden sheen
Fell on the upturn'd faces of the flowers.
But little now reck'd Idas of the hour,
And little of its beauty. Ah! what sight
Might blind his eyes when once the baying
ceased

That now seem'd Hope's own music? Had the
pool

Forever closed above her? Or would she,
With lilies far less white and delicate
Stare from its edge with fix'd unseeing eyes
Upon the blue above them? Then he thought
Of how the bear had almost conquer'd him,
And saw her bruised and mangled in the fern.
But on and on the blind hound, baying, went
With Idas close behind her. Nearing now
The shadow'd pool, his heart grew heavier;
But while he steel'd himself to learn the fate
Of all he loved and cherish'd, once again

IDYLLS OF GREECE

The hound stood still and sniff'd uneasily
The air about her. Then she whined and slunk
To where her master waited, glooming now,
His eyes so useless. Then again she sniff'd
The air itself, unmindful of the grass,
And seem'd at fault; but ever from the pool
Would turn her head. And Idas petted her;
But though she knew his meaning, on the grass
She lay and whined with fine, uplifted head,
And would not move. Then Idas left her there
To seek behind the bushes, finding naught,
And so came back, and watch'd her. Now he
knew

That she was borne from that well-trodden path
That cleft the forest to the shelter'd pool
By some grim enemy, or beast or man;
And while his hands were eager to bequeath
Red death on aught that held her, in his heart
Her face alone was imaged, only hers.
But while he wonder'd at the hound's distress,
And bade her seek and find again the scent,
There came a first, faint puff of perfumed wind
From off the mountains, and the hound leap'd
up

Alert and silent; then she sniff'd again
And ever grew more eager. And at last,
When sure she seem'd of something, something
hid

IDAS AND MARPESSA

From Idas' understanding, through the woods
Her full-mouth'd baying boom'd. Then on
again,

With head erect as if her eyes could see,
The faithful brute proceeded; ever on
Now whining and now baying. And behind
Strode eager Idas, firm-lipp'd, resolute,
And hard his hand embraced his trusted spear.

THE sun was setting ere he came on them.
While yet afar Marpessa heard the hound,
And cried to Idas, knowing he was near.
And he had leap'd to clasp her, calling her
In tones that voiced his anguish, asking not
Why thus he found her with the god of song;
But scorning him and hating. But the god
Still kept them parted, and had taunted him
With mocking words, the while confronting
him.

"Fly hence while yet thou mayst," he cried
to him.

"Thy wife is mine. Death holds his shroud
o'er thee;

But she has turn'd her glances to the heights
Where I abide in splendor. Mine she is;
And me she loves for my immortal song
And all that makes me god-like." Hearing him,
It seem'd to Idas that the gods had rock'd

IDYLLS OF GREECE

The petty world, and that along with it
He totter'd to destruction. In his ears,
As booming seas may thunder in a cave,
A roaring menace sounded, and he clutch'd
The air about him wildly, giddily,
And could not speak; could only clutch the air,
And stare at her whose name he could not say
Despite his heart's deep longing. But the voice
Of pale Marpessa cried across the dusk:
"I love thee, Idas! In its constancy
My heart so steep'd is that it laughs at death.
The wolf will better rear our little ones
Than this bright Splendor who has threaten'd
us;

And, rather than be his, and dwell in light,
I'd feel once more thy lips upon mine eyes,
Hear once thy voice assure me of thy love,
And, with thine arm about me, seek the mists."
And though he could not answer her as yet,
He look'd his yearning, stunn'd and impotent
To cry his grief, but longing to unite
His iron hands around the marble throat
Of him who ever eyed him with disdain.
And still Apollo mock'd him: "She shall sit
With me in glory, and shall lean to me
When thou art long forgotten. At her feet
I heap my gifts of immortality
And love eternal. Go, while I am kind;

IDAS AND MARPESSA

Thy wife my love is. If I stare at thee
Thy days are ended." And again she cried,
As one who sees her loved one perishing:
"I love thee, Idas, who art all to me;"
And fain had touch'd him with her trembling
hand,
But could not. And while yet she gazed at
him
With love and anguish in the eyes so dear,
He found his speech and thunder'd: "God thou
art,
But foul seducer also. In the woods
Are they that hate thee—Isse, Chione,
And Zephyrus, whom Hyacinthus scorn'd.
Despite thy splendor, and thy gift of song,
Loathsome thou art to things of purity,
Defiler and vain boaster. In the skies
Thy station is, to serve the Thunderer,
Lest, anger'd, he chastise thee. Sweet thy
hymns
In ears that still are strangers to the songs
Of earth's dear birds. The while thou gleamest
there
Thou art a menace, and the foe of all
That makes our short-year'd life seem bearable.
I hate thee, and would rid the woods of thee.
Now aid thou me, great Zeus, a simple man,
Yet righteous in my anger and my love.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Guide thou my spear, and tip its point with
death

That I may slay this robber, win mine own,
And bless thee for thy succor." Swiftly then
He hurl'd the dart, but slipp'd and saw it pierce
An oak behind Apollo. And the god,
Now bright with anger, tore the quiv'ring shaft
From out the tree and posed to hurtle it
Against defenceless Idas. Even now
The mists were heavy in Marpessa's eyes,
And she was praying for the man she loved,
When lo! the shades were scatter'd. In their
midst

Stood one of grave, majestic countenance,
As golden as Apollo, but serene
And conscious of his power. Then to the earth
The spear was lower'd, and Marpessa's hand
Was raised in supplication. But the eyes
Of him that stood there were the eyes of one
Who awed all men to silence, and her words
Remain'd unutter'd in her anguish'd breast.
Then, turning first to where Apollo gleam'd,
He eyed him gravely. "Is dissension sweet,"
He ask'd, and pointed to the lower'd spear,
"That thus ye fight when from the western
skies

My glory is departing? From the soil
Sweet incense rises, and the trees are still'd

IDAS AND MARPESSA

In solemn adoration. Even now
The stars prepare to smile upon the world,
And all is hush'd. The spear is in thy hand;
Thy brow is anger'd. I await thy words."
And then Apollo storm'd. "The maid is mine,
I love her. She would share——" But Idas

now

Strode hotly forward. "O great Zeus," he
cried,

"The bright god lies! This woman is my wife,
My loved Marpessa. We are wed, are one.
Thy praise we sing together, and our babes
Await her in their cradle. She is mine."

And then the wroth Apollo frown'd at him:

"If I but speak thou fallest at my feet,
And hell shall open to receive thy ghost.
Who, then, art thou to look me in the eyes
And say: 'Thou liest'? I can harass thee
And make thy days a torment. Thou shalt
learn

My awful vengeance; thou shalt cry to me
As Jason cried when hurried to his death."

But Idas answer'd: "Nay, I fear thee not.

A man I am, and I can die but once.

Death has for me no terrors. Could I hold

Thy gleaming hair, I'd stand erect in hell

And deem my life well ended but to shout:

'Behold Apollo, who would harm my wife!'"

IDYLLS OF GREECE

And then again Apollo raised his spear,
But Zeus commanded and again it dropp'd.
And then he turn'd to where Marpessa stood,
All pale and trembling. "It shall rest with
thee

To choose thy lover," said the grave-eyed god.
"But ponder well before thou utterest
Thy heart's desire. Beneath these gentle trees
A hero claims thee, and a gleaming god.
To each thou art a treasure, but to one
Thyself thou givest. It shall rest with thee
To choose thy destiny—to dwell on high
Or on the earth that is a part of thee.
Who loves Apollo must be sometimes sad.
The song that trembles on his crimson lips
Is heard by many and of many loved.
The woods are his, the mountains. Where he
goes

All hearts adore him, but he passes on
To other conquests and to other loves.
Apollo says he loves thee. If with him
Thou goest hence, thou shalt immortal be;
Shalt watch the birth of worlds, the vanishing
Of all that now is bright and wonderful.
Beside me thou shalt sit when life is done.
The stars shall be thy children, and the winds
Shall sing thy praises ere the dusk descends.
And if thy choice be Idas, thou shalt know

IDAS AND MARPESSA

The even bliss of mortals and their griefs.
The dawn shall wake thee, and the night shall
bring

Thy head unto its pillow where lies his
Who shares with thee thy sorrow and thy
joy.

Thy babes will love thee, but shall sometime go
Beyond the silent longing of thine eyes,
Beyond thy hand's caresses. Even he,
Whose hair turns whiter while thou kissest it,
Must go at last; and thou must follow him,
And bid farewell to light and all that made
Thy little day seem perfect. Being gone
Thou soon shalt be forgotten. Few are they
Whose names are number'd with the names of
stars;

Thy little pleasure must be had to-day.
For man is dust. His dreams are of the sky;
But all the toys that bring him happiness
Lie strewn between his cradle and his grave."
And while he spoke, Marpessa forward lean'd
As if to choose; but with commanding eyes
The grave god held her while he spoke again.
"Apollo's hand would raise thee to the heights;
But Sorrow's face in airy solitudes
Is not unknown, for she is everywhere
Where hearts may beat. She, too, will follow
thee

IDYLLS OF GREECE

If thou with Idas goest. At her knees
Ye both must kneel when that dark moment
comes

That comes alike to those whom Love makes
one

And those whom Love ne'er blesses. Choose
thou now."

And while Apollo eyed her haughtily,
Too sure of conquest, Idas lean'd to her
With outstretch'd arms, still hungry for her
love

And fearful she might leave him. But his
doubt

Was vain and idle, as a man's doubt is—
Who learns what love is only when 't is lost;
For, laughing now, Marpessa ran to him,
Heedless of bright Apollo or of Zeus,
And with her arms close-twined about his neck
Cried: "Idas! O my Idas!" Thus they
gazed

In eyes where tears were welling; thus they
stood

To all oblivious save their happy selves,
And said no word, but gazed, and gazed
again.

And when at last they turn'd, it was to find
The gods had vanish'd and themselves alone.
Alone they stood amid the leafy peace,

IDAS AND MARPESSA

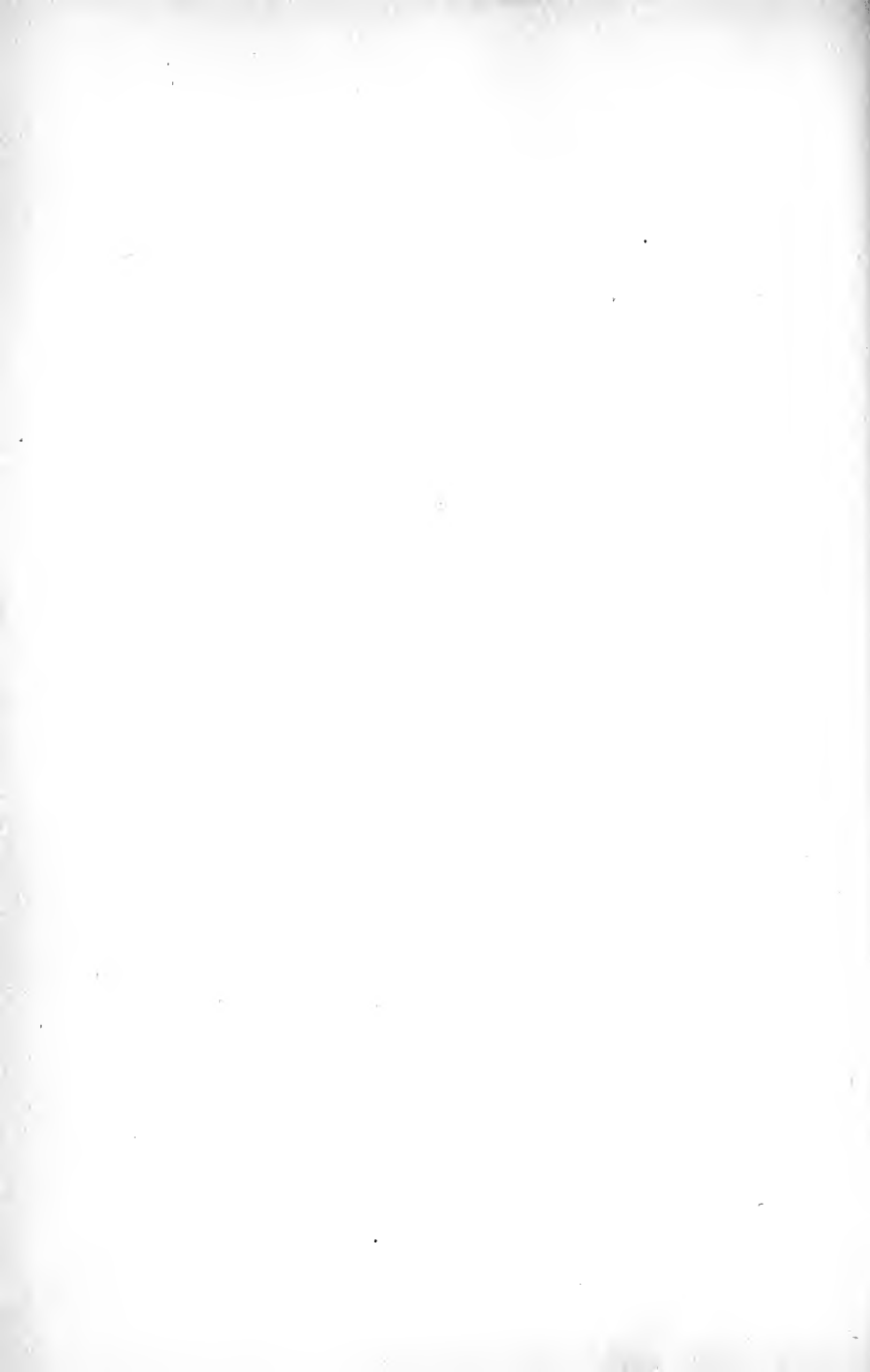
Beneath the skies where now gleam'd wondrously

The blessed star of Even; in their hearts

The love that cares not what the future holds,

Nor ever dreams of death; and at their feet

The blind old hound, awaiting their caress.



RHODANTHE



RHODANTHE

ON Ida's slopes, that faced the gleaming
sea,
The forest nymphs were gather'd. On
the grass
They lay and gossip'd, while above their heads
The trees sway'd gently in the constant wind
That troubled Ilium's hot and endless plain.
Their task it was, and well it suited them
Whose fair white limbs were tireless as the
deer's,
To follow white Diana. When the sound
Of winding horns awoke the solitudes
Of mountain crests or valleys, like a flash
They pass'd with her, their Mistress; in the
dusk
They hid with her in places where no man
Might dare to follow, places consecrate

IDYLLS OF GREECE

To loveliness and rapture. There they sang
Such songs as oft the solitary hears
On nights of blue and silver, songs that seem
Like whisp'ring waters or the sighs of leaves
Lamenting joyous day's impermanence.

But now alone they gossip'd. Where She
stray'd

They knew not, nor might question; but,
perhaps,

If over-long the mystery puzzled them,
Pictured a dim retreat amid the fern,
A shepherd woo'd from duty, and Herself
Beside him list'ning to his youthful dreams.

Where lay the nymphs the grass was still as
cool

As when the sky first trembled, and the Night
In silent flight look'd backward fearfully,

Well knowing who was coming. For although
The sun was toiling upward steadily,
And all was hot around them, curtain-like

The trees were arch'd above these whisp'ring
nymphs,

Embow'ring them in shadow. At their feet

A little stream fuss'd noisily to sea,
Here splashing over bowlders, there at peace,
And everywhere most joyous. Now and then
A maid approach'd it, and with laughing eyes
Beheld her own sweet beauty mirror'd there;

RHODANTHE

Or cool'd her cheeks and dried them with her
hair,
Wherein the wind had left such fragrances
As flowers exhale in rivalry with trees;
Or quench'd her thirst and, turning, took her
place
Beside the one whose confidence she shared.

NOW, one there was in that chaste sisterhood
Whose face so fair was that the nymphs
themselves
Would gaze at her in wonder; and the moths
Whose wings disturb'd the breathlessness of
night,
Would pause above her, thinking they had
found
A strange, new flower so constant to the dark
That only they might see it. She was one
Whose birth the sea had witness'd; with its
blue
Her eyes were dower'd; its constant restless-
ness
Possess'd her heart and made her sometimes sad
And sometimes joyous. But the face of her
Was perfect ever, and as luminous
As is the moon's on holy nights of June.
And this same maid, Rhodanthe, on a day
When, clapping hands beneath a smiling sun,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

The glinting waves raced shoreward, to the
sands

Had wander'd idly. Was it Fate that drew
Her white feet thither from the forest's shade,
From peace and green seclusion? For, the
while

Her eyes dream'd seaward, and herself seem'd
lost

In heaving splendor, foam-tipp'd and as blue
As was the sky above her, on the waves
Up-borne by weeds she saw a white-brow'd
youth

Whose eyes were closed apparently in death.
Half couch'd upon the mass of green-gold weeds
From monstrous gardens, where the awful swirl
Of dim, deep waters sways them to and fro,
And rends and heaves them upward, he was
borne

Above the hungry clamor of the waves
That threaten'd to engulf him. And the nymph
With upraised hands call'd loudly to the gods
To save so fair a thing, if in him burn'd
The fickle flame that warms us when alive,
And leaps away so suddenly at death.
Then, plunging in, she swam with him to shore
And laid the body on the warmer sand
And rubb'd it till the eyes op'd wearily;
And closed again before the black of them

RHODANTHE

Inform'd him of the mercy of the gods—
Of all the love that brooded over him.
For never yet had pale Rhodanthe seen
So fair a thing in manhood. From afar
The nymph had eyed the shepherds on the hills
And thought them pleasing as they piped, or
sang

When dusk aroused their longings. Tall they
were

And strong of limb; but he, above whose form
Her gaze now soften'd was a youth as fair
As the blown foam about her, and his hair
Was blacker than the panoply of Night.

And while she touch'd those ivory cheeks of his
A blush suffused them, as the tides of life
Flow'd slowly back and warm'd them. Then he
sigh'd.

And while he sigh'd, with fringed eyes still
closed

Against Rhodanthe's beauty, to his mouth
Her lips descended, drawn there by the pain
Those lips had music'd. But he knew it not,
Being as one who was not, one to whom
Life is as nothing, and desire of life;
As one who dreaming not is fortunate.
And long she waited, tending him the while
With hands so eager and solicitous
He must have thrill'd beneath them, eyeing him

IDYLLS OF GREECE

With ardent looks, yet modest; half-afraid
That when he woke, the sea, his enemy,
Would lure him thence and leave her desolate.
For oft, while list'ning to the whisper'd tales
Of nymphs at sundown while she bound her
hair,

The maid had wonder'd why Diana frown'd
To hear them talk of shepherds, and of loves
In silent, leafy places. Like as not,
If still they whisper'd of forbidden things,
The Goddess bade them rise and follow her
From glade to glade, until the hopeless moon
Peep'd through its fleecy veil and bade them
sleep.

And sometimes when she near'd the haunts of
men,

While shelter'd by the olives, she had seen
A youth beside a maiden, looking not
At stars or flowers; but ever, hand in hand,
Treading the path with eyes that gazed in eyes
To all oblivious save the loved one near.
And telling this to them that question'd her
When gleam'd the stars, they told her it was
love

That drew the twain together; and they sigh'd,
And thought, perhaps, of babes that should
have lain

In arms where naught might nestle, and of lips

RHODANTHE

Whose warmth might bring forgetfulness of
death.

And while she listen'd to the idle talk
Of nymphs as discontented as herself,
Her gaze roved elsewhere; for her years were
few,

And love to her was still a mystery,
Along with pale Diana's loveliness
And Pan's inconstant piping. Blest indeed
Had she but known it. Death is pitiless;
But who shall say that Love is merciful
While hearts still suffer, and a lover's grief
Might draw compassion from the very stones!

THE day still golden was when he awoke
And look'd at her in wonder. From his
side

She shrank dismay'd, and drew her wind-blown
hair

About her bosom, while her eyes were fix'd
Upon the sands beside him. But he lean'd
And touch'd her hand. "Oh! who art thou?"
he cried,

In tones so soft it seem'd to her that his
No voice of mortal was, but of a god
Who soon would leave her. "All I owe to
thee—

The air, this blessèd sunshine, and the sight

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Of thy chaste loveliness. Oh! who art thou?
Perhaps I dream? Perhaps thou art a thing
As frail and unsubstantial as the mist
That mocks me on the waters in the dawn?
Perhaps—Yet no. Oh! say not I am dead.
Thy flesh is warm; thy cheeks are delicate
As is the wild-rose, and thy gaze is kind.
I know this sea; this wind has been my friend
Since erst the gentle Hours were 'ware of me—
Oh! tell me that I live, and who thou art.”
Then, looking up, she answer'd: “From the sea
I drew thee here, O thou, most beautiful,
The gods had envied thee thy loveliness
And wish'd thy youth to grace the underworld,
Where heavy Age and grey Unhappiness
Bemoan the vanish'd day. I drew thee here
And won thee back to living. In the woods
I am the nymph Rhodanthe. Night and day
I tend Diana. I—But say thy name”;
(And now she whisper'd in her eagerness)
“Oh! let me hear the music of thy name
That I may know how loveliness is call'd,
And sing it softly when the stars are out,
And cedarn fragrances delight the woods
But make me conscious of my loneliness.”
But he, who eyed her still as though she were
A frail white flower, new-risen from the sands,
Could only murmur as he gazed at her:

RHODANTHE

“Rhodanthe!” And if thou who redest this
Hast sadly mused o’er one name’s melody
In desolation’s slowly-creeping hour,
Thy heart shall tell thee all the thoughts of him
Who eyed that little maid so long ago.
“Rhodanthe!” Oh! the tenderness of it.
So long ago it was. Yet see her there,
Awaken’d love’s first wonder in her eyes
And love’s first sorrow shadowing her mouth—
So small a thing when measured by its joy,
So drawn, so very drawn in wistfulness.
She fears him not, but closer leans to him
With hands half-hidden in the golden sand,
Unconscious in her flower-like innocence.
And while he whispers yet again her name,
The fickle sea that erst had menaced him
Now rolls in foamy worship at her feet
And charms her with its music. And at last,
When he had said that pretty name of hers
In all love’s varied accents, and her sighs
Recall’d him from his dreaming, of himself
He told the story. “Chromis call thou me,
The son of Polyclea. On the shore
Not far from Troy my hut is, and each morn
Beneath the ghostly draperies of the mist
I drag my nets upon the restless sea
For daily food. When I was but a babe
The waters lured my father to his death,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

A brother, too; and I had follow'd them,
This very day had sigh'd where now they sigh,
But thou, Rhodanthe of the lower'd eyes
And wind-enamor'd tresses, savedst me
To wonder at thy beauty. Chromis holds
No note of magic; if thou sayest it
The stars shall note me and the gods look
down

To see who bears a name so musical."
And speaking thus he touch'd her hand again,
Yet ah! so tenderly. And she look'd up
But eyed the sea, half-fearful of his gaze,
Though dreaming of him ever. Then again
He cried: "Rhodanthe!" And the winds
withdrew

That Love's swift arrows might the straighter
fly,

For so the gods had will'd it. Then she turn'd,
And look'd at him who on his bended knees
Beheld no more the glory of the sea;
Who paid no heed to the descending sun
Or aught that was around him, seeing her
Who gleam'd beside him. And at last she
spoke,

And sad the voice was of the little maid:
"I hear thee speak, and yet I hear thee not.
Thy voice is softer than the call at night
Of dove to dove; and, hearing, I forget

RHODANTHE

Each treasur'd word. Oh! say my name again,
For never yet has nymph so utter'd it;
And though Diana loves me, and has bound
These wanton tresses with her own cool hands,
Her voice is stern. Ah! say my name again,
And I'll say thine. O Chromis, say my name!"
And now, by that strange law that ever draws
Inconsequential stars to greater suns,
And drift upon the bosom of the deep
To other drift of greater magnitude,
So these two children of the woods and sea
Were drawn together. But as yet they sigh'd
And only look'd their longing. With her hand
She touch'd the locks that gloom'd above his
brow,
And whisper'd: "Chromis!"; and his own lay
soft
Upon her frail cheek's whiteness as he cried:
"Rhodanthe! O Rhodanthe!" Then she sigh'd
And lean'd away. "The wind in leafless trees
No sadder than thy voice is," she replied.
"The world is now most beautiful to me
Because the utter'd music of thy name
Has made me think of Spring; is mine so sad
That thus thou sayest it? And yet, again,
Oh! say 'Rhodanthe.' Thou hast charmèd me
And taught me of a strange and honey'd pain
Whereof I suffer when thou silent art."

IDYLLS OF GREECE

But now he rose, and leaning over her,
Press'd her head backward till he saw her eyes,
Now wet with tears. "O tender nymph," he
cried,

"O white Rhodanthe! If my voice is sad
Thine eyes are sadder. When thou worshipest
The laughing Spring, with white and leaping
lambs

And shy-eyed flowers and fresh-apparell'd trees,
Are thus thy blue eyes tear'd? And is thy
mouth,

As now it is, a bow of wistfulness?"

But saying naught, she only closed her eyes
Against the yearning question of his face,
And dream'd in darkness. But he sensed her
dream

And kneel'd again beside her. And the while,
Loosed from its fringed nest, each exiled tear
Dropp'd to its doom, his arms had circled
her

And, cheek by cheek, they thought no more of
time.

"Rhodanthe!" he had whisper'd. "Let thine
eyes

Behold my worship. Ah! far bluer they
Than nodding corn-flowers or the hyacinths
That smell the sweetest when the stars are out.
Rhodanthe! Thou my love art." As he spoke

RHODANTHE

His voice became a whisper. Overhead
The sky was now as soft as were the hearts
That beat beneath it, for Day's chronicler
Had seen the crowning of Love's purposes
And now was hasting westward; and the sea
Had ceased its azure revelry, and lay
Expectant of Night's unimpassion'd kiss.
And then, as Chromis laid upon her hair
His trembling hand, half-fearful of its weight,
And sigh'd his longing, to his lips she placed
Her low, cool brow, and said, as one in prayer:
"I love thee too, O Chromis. Cherish me!"

AND fain had Chromis borne his love away
When dawn peep'd in upon their resting
place
Of shelt'ring fern. Throughout one fragrant
night,
They dream'd, as lovers may, of other things
Than we may dream of, who with hopeless eyes
Await To-morrow's verdicts, and the gifts
Too long delay'd to prove desirable.
For they were young; and then, they were in
love.

And though the sky was scintillant with stars,
Each eager to behold them; and the moon,
Late hasting on her ever-hopeless quest,
Held for their sakes her beauty from the world,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

And seem'd no larger than a silvern leaf
Upon the walks of heaven, of love alone
They thought that first, fleet night that made
them one.

But when the birds aroused them, and the light
Reminded of Diana, to his lips
Rhodanthe lean'd. "Belovèd, it is day,"
She whisper'd sadly, "and the woods awake;
And I must hence before She seeks for me
Among my sisters. See! I kiss thy hair,
And place my hand upon thy crimson lips
That droop in sorrow. Should I perish now
I would not murmur; for my memories
Are mine forever, and the mists of hell
Would seem all-golden while I dream'd of thee.
Day bids me leave thee. But the night shall
find

Us twain together. Oh! I'll come to thee
Though Styx's waters part us; if the earth
Were strewn about with crystal-pointed stars
I'd pick my way across them just to see
Thy dear eyes' welcome and thy loveliness."
Then swiftly upward springing she was gone,
And Chromis, ere he knew it, was alone.

RHODANTHE

BUT Cos, the shepherd, brown and sap-
ling-straight,
Had loved Rhodanthe since he startled
her

One morning on the uplands. Where the winds
Danced wildest on the grasses, and the flowers
Nodded their heads to airs so fanciful

No pipe might play them, with her teasing hair
The nymph was busied. So she saw him not,
Who stood and wonder'd if so fair a thing

Were earth or sea-born, or if he but dream'd
Such dreams as sometimes haunt one in the day.

And when at last, that mad hair being held
In sweet subjection, from the wind she turn'd
To loiter woodward, on his oaken staff

She saw him leaning, and had straightway fled
Had he not call'd her. Even then she stood

Alert for flight, as stands the fearful fawn
When first it hears the menace of the hound;

But when he spoke she eased her anxious foot
And fear'd him not. "Oh! loose thy golden
hair,"

The youth had cried. "No eyes save mine may
see

The sunbeams toss'd and tangled by the wind.

For thou a goddess art, about whose brows

Day's glory hovers, and the brows of thee

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Are chaste as is the azure of the sea.”
And she to tease this child of solitude,
This idler in the sunshine, laugh’d at him,
And gave the winds, the still desirous winds,
Her hair to wreak their will on. And again
They rush’d to where she waited, swaying her
As they might sway a lily, and on high
Swirl’d her bright hair until its golden sheen
Seem’d like the mist whence issue new-born suns.
Then Cos, the shepherd, dropp’d his oaken staff,
But could not voice his longings, and the
nymph
Had danced before him; and while yet he stood
As one afraid of utter loveliness,
Had turn’d and vanish’d, laughing, down the
glade.

AND once again he saw her, as she bent
One golden morning, o’er a daffodil,
Expectant of Diana. Through the pines
He spied upon her beauty, questioning
If aught so fair would ever kneel with him
Where violets breathed sweet fragrance on the
air;
Where lilies white and blue forget-me-nots
Whisper’d their dreams, while gaudy crocuses
Laugh’d at the shy and pale anemone.
And wond’ring thus, forgetful of his sheep,

RHODANTHE

The shepherd sigh'd, a sigh so pitiful
It seem'd all grief was homed within his
heart.

And, half-afraid, Rhodanthe turn'd to him,
But laugh'd as suddenly. "O silly Cos!"
She cried across the sunshine; "I can see
Thy mournful eyes behind the veil of green;
I see thy wolf's skin and thy shepherd's crook.
O gentle Cos, come forth. I fear thee not."
Then Cos came forth, but slowly; and remain'd
Beside the trees that erst had shelter'd him;
And could not speak, until she ask'd of him
Why thus he sigh'd. "The morn is golden-
wing'd,

And yet thou sighest. Hast thou lost thy sheep
That thus thy cheek is hollow'd? From thy
brow

Care drives what dreams should sit there, and
thine eyes

Like lanterns are that hold no friendly light."
And he had laid his shepherd's staff aside
And pull'd a reed from out his shaggy pouch,
Then eyed her shyly. "In the woods," he said,
"I hear sweet music. I will play for thee,
Because my mood is sadder than thine own,
The memories of autumn-sober'd trees."

But while he play'd, Rhodanthe laugh'd at him.
"What knowest thou of forest mysteries?"

IDYLLS OF GREECE

She cried to him. "Thy sheep may list to thee;

But thou, a man, art dull-ear'd. I have heard
The bud's first whisper'd hopes; the songs of
leaves

In fullest summer when the air was bright
With golden promise. I have heard their sighs
When slowly falling to the lap of earth
They mourn'd their little hour, so quickly sped.
And I have seen the brown-robed multitudes
With winter's snows upon them, still'd at last,
And dreaming not of sorrows nor of joys.
Strange things I know; but thou a shepherd art
With large, deaf ears, and eyes that nothing see
Except thy sheep. Thy limbs are brown and
strong;

Thy hair is wilder than a Mænad's song
And golden as Apollo's in the dawn;
Then put thy pipe away and tell me why
Thy cheek so hollow is, thine eye so sad?"
And he, abash'd, and wounded by her mirth,
Had play'd no more; but stood with wistful
eyes

Beside the laurels that had shelter'd him;
And gazed at her. Thus dies a singer's song
When star-ward soaring in his eagerness
The singer hears the earth-chain'd mouthe at
him,

RHODANTHE

Hating his flights and envious of the song
That seeks to lead them upward to the free.
But soon he spoke. "Thy name Rhodanthe is.
Last night, ere yet the silver-hornèd moon
Slipp'd from her low-swung couch to climb the
skies

And count her stars, I wander'd in the woods,
Alone and heavy-hearted. On the air
I heard a music as of homing bees,
Each moment coming nearer; to the sound
I strain'd my ear, and lo! two voices then
Were born of that sweet humming. In the fern
I threw me down, and scarce each startled frond
Resumed its calm when through the stilly dusk
Two figures flash'd. And one of them was
thine.

But ere ye vanish'd I, with eager eyes,
And beating heart and eagle-wingèd feet,
Was hasting after, fearless of the thorns
But fearful lest a stray, embitter'd twig
Might cry my presence to thy tiny ears.
But on ye sped, oft laughing; and at last,
When almost spent, as is the hound-heel'd stag,
I thought to run no longer, to a glade
Ye sudden came and dropp'd from out my
sight."

But now Rhodanthe, who had heard his tale
With eyes of mirth and mischief, cried to him

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Across her gather'd daffodils: "O Cos!
If Pan had caught thee he had sent lean wolves
To harm thy sheep; had bound thee to an oak
With sappy creepers till Diana came
And chill'd thy pulses, turning thee to stone
To punish thy presumption." But the youth
Was dreaming now. "I only thought of
thee,"

He almost whisper'd. "Now, most fearfully,
From tree to tree I glided, and at last
Through bushes peeping saw such loveliness
As stars may sing of, or the winds describe
When gods grow weary. Maids so beautiful
Were gather'd there, it seem'd the Night had
lured

Her chastest votaries from hidden dells,
Where naught beholds them save the things that
dream

In utter stillness of forest loves."
But now he look'd with ardent eyes at her,
With eyes wherein Hope's eager light still
burn'd

And longing glisten'd. "On the grass," he
sigh'd,

"Thy sisters lay like lilies; thou alone
Wert kneeling, and the blessèd face of thee
Seem'd like a wistful star. And while I watch'd
With beating heart, one call'd thee by thy name,

RHODANTHE

And all the trees around me, e'en the leaves
That press'd against my body seem'd to cry:
'Rhodanthe!' And while yet I linger'd there
I heard afar the owl's portentous hoot
That tells Diana's coming; ere I fled
To where the blackest woods might hide from
me

All sights except my pictured dreams of thee,
I saw her face. But thine is lovelier!"
And while she laugh'd, and hid her daffodils
Beneath her golden tresses, he advanced
Still pleading dumbly with his outstretch'd
hands

For that which seems to youth the anodyne
For all this pain of living. But again
The nymph, retreating slowly, laugh'd at him,
Although less kindly. "Thou hast seen," she
said,

"Such things as are forbidden, silly Cos.
Hast thou not heard of uncontroll'd men
With snowy hair belied by iron limbs,
Who nothing know of human fellowship,
But live alone till Death shall beckon them?
These men have seen Diana. They have long'd
For things beyond them as the wind 's beyond
Their fingers' idle clutching. Now they shock
The night with hollow laughter, or dismay
The bloodless snake with eyes that never close;

IDYLLS OF GREECE

They wake the woods with hard and hollow
 song,
Or whisper vainly to the tree and star.
O silly Cos, thy secret lies with me;
But go thou now, and let thy gentle eyes
Find otherwheres their pleasure. When thou
 canst,
Forget Rhodanthe. On his moveless back
Old Atlas bears the burden of the world;
But naught so heavy is as hopeless love—
And thou art but a shepherd.” Then she fled.

BUT Cos stay’d on beneath the self-same
 pines
That erst had heard her laughter. On the
 sword
He crouch’d and brooded, dreaming still of
 her—
As Night may dream of her evanish’d Day,
As hopeless men still dream of what is lost.
It almost seem’d she stood there, slimly white
Amid the leafy hush, and lily-straight;
Upon her breast the envied daffodils,
Shelter’d from truant breezes by her hair;
A maid in whom a god might find delight;
Whose presence lent a beauty to a world
Already lovely but already sad.
But e’en as dropp’d the unconcernèd sun

RHODANTHE

Behind the purple mountains, and the skies
Turn'd ever blacker, so the loveliness
Of life became illusion unto Cos
And all his thoughts the thoughts of blighted
trees.

And still he crouch'd there like a thing of stone
Until all love had died within his heart
And his the torment was of one in hell.
And brooding thus there grew in him a hate
Of all fair things, of life, of love itself,
And even of Rhodanthe. In the dark
He crouch'd and gloom'd the while the Hours
pass'd

Above his awful silence; and at last
When Dawn was come, sprang quickly to his
feet,
Storm'd at the grey with horror-clutching
hands

And call'd the curses of the gods on her.
Then through the woods he stumbled, noting
not

The pensive ferns or that embroidery
With which the soil is cover'd, color'd leaves
And modest creepers, and the woodsy blooms
With eyes still closed against morn's joyous-
ness.

For now it seem'd a more Titanic load
Than ever Atlas shoulder'd for his pride

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Now bore him down. If wedged with meteors,
Cool'd constellations and all cosmic dust,
The heavy world in star-high balances
Be weigh'd against one woe-cramm'd human
heart,

That heart will swing those others to the skies
And crack the scales in falling. Through the
woods

He blindly stumbled, sometimes cursing her
Whose laughter he remember'd, whose rebuke
Seem'd hot as flame around him; even now,
Though she was gone, and all alone he was
Save for the silent, mirthless ministrants
That sniff the steps of Madness and Despair.

AND though from dawn till dusk Rho-
danthe flash'd

With white Diana through the greenery,
Stopping at times when lured by Pan's sweet
pipes

Or when the Huntress bade her maidens rest,
Night found her with her lover. In the woods
Are silent places where a whisper'd tale
Sounds sweeter far than music; glades and dells
Wherein a constant bird may mourn its mate
With song that wakes our saddest memories
And hints its kinship with us. These they
knew,

RHODANTHE

And hid there, heedless of the peeping stars,
Or roving winds; for stars and roving winds
Are lovers' friends, and mourn eternally
The hopes that are as fated as the leaves.
But what knows Youth of Fate? The very bird
Whose heart is broken is a feather'd joy
To him whose heart is whole with happiness;
An envied thing, at liberty to soar
In wide, blue fields of freedom. And the winds,
Whose mournful voices to our duller ears
Remind of what is over, unto her
Whose eyes dream upward sing of things to be.
And though the woods were ever beautiful
To Chromis and Rhodanthe, in themselves
Abode the charm that ever lured their eyes
To one another. As he lean'd to her,
Such words he murmur'd as can change the
 night
To the blest dusk of lovers. "On thy cheeks
I see thy mournful lashes," he had said.
"So fair thy face, they lie there in dark peace,
Bearing thy white lids downward. Look at me,
O sweet Rhodanthe, for they rest too long—
I envy e'en thy lashes!" But her hands
Now clasp'd his face, and she no more look'd
 down.
"Though closed mine eyes," she whisper'd,
 "thee I see,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Belovèd Chromis. Thou art everywhere
Because thy face is pictured in my heart
Since first I saw thee. When Diana calls
In the cool hush of morning, by my side
Thou treadest lightly; though I follow fast
Her horn's defiance to the hidden boar,
Thou runnest with me. Once I look'd behind,
Expectant of thy presence. Fickle one,
I see thee ever, though mine eyes be closed."
And he was happy. "In the dawn," he said,
"I sing new songs. The sea reminds of thee.
Thine eyes have languish'd in the happy waves,
Bequeathing them their color. White the foam
As is thy moon-bright body, and at times
My lilting boat is mesh'd in wondrous weeds
That gleam as does thy sun-enamor'd hair.
Should aught befall to sunder thee from me,
I could not live, Rhodanthe. From the skies
The stars might lean at Even breathlessly,
And lilies upward gaze expectantly;
But never more would song of mine disturb
The drowsy calm between the flower and star
If I no more possess'd thee. Speak to me!"
"Thou wouldst but sing the better," she re-
plied.
"Thy song would tell the world thy constancy,
And many men would love thee. In thy heart
Thy love would turn to sympathy and song;

RHODANTHE

And though a sorrow linger'd in thine eyes
Thy love would keep thee straight as is the fir,
And ever fragrant. Ah! When I am gone—"
But while she spoke he kiss'd her, silencing
Her drooping lips before the night was told
The woe she presaged. "Thou art all to me,"
He breathed upon their crimson. "From the
woods

I soon shall take thee. Thou shalt come with
me

To where my seaward-looking hut awaits
Its perfect mistress. There no drunken Pan,
No stern Diana with the chilling eyes,
Can ever find thee. Thou shalt sing to me
And whisper of the one that is to be
While, mending nets, I kneel as now I kneel
Beside thee, sweet Rhodanthe." And again
He kiss'd and kiss'd her, till her cheeks, erst
pale,

Were warm as summer's roses; but her eyes,
That gazed beyond him, seeing but the dark,
Unknown to him were sadder than before.
And when she spoke it was as one who is
Too wise to be quite happy. "Thou and I"—
And oh! how now her eyes were fix'd on him—
"Are but the playthings of the older gods.
With them it rests to say what things shall be
Beyond the moment. Kiss me, my Belov'd,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

And in thine arms' sure haven gather me.
I love thee well; but thou and I must bow
To them that sit in judgment. Even now
Perhaps they mock us, and bid Death prepare
The bitter cup that cures all mortal ills,
But ends what joys we gather as we pass."
Then close she nestled to the lad she loved.
And he close held her, sighing in her ear
Such words as lovers utter while the world
Rolls on its course unheeding; while the Hours
All-swiftly pass, and while the air is fill'd
With shimm'ring music, as of wings unseen,
Or faintest waves on far, uncharted shores.

O HALF-HEARD silences of holy Night,
Suggestive and appealing! Idle lie
Day's golden shawms that blare in wearied ears
Insistent pæans for the conquerors
Of stern and hard-eyed Fate; and silent are
The herald trumpets of the scornful sun.
From airy heights ye tremble over us,
From heights wherein the unpretentious moon
Whispers pale prayer above all things that are,
Above all things that slumber while they pass
The common way and wait the common doom.
Your toneless music soothes the anguish'd
heart
Of hopeless love; like benediction's calm

RHODANTHE

It falls upon earth's lovers, as they search
The starry fields of promise over them;
It stills the voice of protest, and of grief.
O half-heard silences of holy Night,
Suggestive and appealing! From the skies
Drift, drift to us forever. Fill our hearts
With that sweet peace whereof the ancient trees
Have fullest understanding; in our ears
Whisper the soft and blessèd harmonies
The fearless flowers rejoice in. Then when
 flares

The crimson fire along the waken'd East,
And paling stars with backward glances go
Beyond our eyes' vain searching, we shall be
As men whose souls made strong by olden song
May bear To-day; as men who having heard
Imperious music, feel that they are gods,
And go their way rejoicing, scorning death.

AND when their chosen bower seem'd all
 a-shine
With filter'd moonlight, and the slumb'ring
 blooms
Exhaled their faint, illusive fragrances,
On fern-hid elbows Chromis raised himself
And eyed the nymph, now utterly asleep.
And watching her he thought of how men said
Love's Goddess was of all things beautiful

IDYLLS OF GREECE

The one most lovely ; but beholding now
The maid beside him, still and marbly-white,
Shook his dark locks above her and was glad.
Upon her arm her perfect head reclined,
Her golden tresses coil'd above a face
So fair, so fond, and yet so innocent
That he grew fearful lest he only dream'd,
So bent and kiss'd her. And while yet his lips
Lay warm on hers, like rose on willing rose,
She ope'd her eyes and drew him down to her
While murmurs proved love's sweet reality.
"I dream'd of thee," she whisper'd, "Thou
and I

On such an island that from milky cliffs
Rises all green and golden, palm'd and still
As the warm sea around it, lived and loved
Unheeded by and heedless of grey Time.
No chilling eyes, our kisses envying,
There chill'd our ardor ; there no eager ears
Lean'd to our broken whispers ; and the while
On morns of gold or eves of violet
We told our dreams, the air no echoes bore
Of iron laughter or of hopeless mirth.
And much we learn'd of lambs, and gentle ewes
And the dear stars above us ; and at last,
Grown old together, we prepared to sleep,
As trees prepare when hoary Winter blows
Ionian dirges on his sombre pipes."

RHODANTHE

"I, too, have dream'd," the youth said tenderly.

"My dreams were such as men, despite day's
glare,

May dream with open eyes. On no such isle
As thy sweet fancy painted did we dwell,
But yonder where the sea beats noisily
By night and day. The woods have frighten'd
thee,

O sweet Rhodanthe, with their stillness
That hints of death; the pale anemones
Are fearful of Diana, and the winds
Moan in the pines because she never loves.
But yonder—thou canst see them through the
trees—

My golden sands await thee. Never there
Comes stern Diana; but if thou wouldst hear,
Grown weary of the thunder of the sea,
Pan's lesser music, I will bring thee here,
And, hidden, thou shalt hear it. Thus I
dream'd

The while I watch'd thee." "Thou art beautiful,"

The nymph replied, and drew him close to her.

"All else forget except that thou and I
Are now together. If the trees could tell
How oft I cry thy name, thy heart would grieve
For poor Rhodanthe, who, though loving thee,
Must sorrow ever." And the youth was still

IDYLLS OF GREECE

As was the night about them, knowing not
Why thus she grieved, or why, though loving
him,

The woods still kept his loved one from his arms.
"Thine eyes are wet, Belovèd!" Chromis
sigh'd;

"Upon thy cheek I see the fallen tear
That tells a sorrow thou wouldst hide from me.
Thy voice is sadder than the hopeless note
Of the lone bird above us. For its mate
It mourns and mourns; but I am close to thee
To whisper of To-morrow, of the years
That wait us with bright gifts and happiness."
Then closer still Rhodanthe clung to him.
"To-morrow is this moment's enemy,
Sweet Chromis," she had answer'd. "Ere the
moon

Enters her eastern wicket, thou and I
May hear no more the bird's sad melody,
Or with slow kisses kindle into flame
Our willing passion. When the dawn is come,
Amid what greyness may our whispers sound,
While the bright gods, who send us to our doom,
Forget that we existed." But the youth
Now kiss'd her eyes. "I only think of thee
And of thy tender beauty," whisper'd he.
"The Now and the To-morrow are as one;
And Time is but a phantom when with thine

RHODANTHE

My kisses mingle. But the gods are good,
Else had I sunk to silence and despair
That golden day which brought thee to my
arms."

"E'en now I hear that first, low sigh of thine,"
Rhodanthe murmur'd. "On mine ear it fell
Like faintest music, and my heart awoke
Before thine eyes were open'd to the world."

"Thy love it was that lured me back," he cried;

"My undecided spirit saw thy face,
And so I lived." "Then love me," she replied;

"Ah! dream not of To-morrow. Love me now.
The Hours are full of menace; trust them not.

If sad I seem the while in thine embrace,

Or if I weep a little, pay no heed,

But love me, love me ever. Who shall say

Why woman's love is mainly mystery,

While man's is only passion? Love me, then.

Beneath this couch of asphodel and fern

What hopeless ones may wander, unto whom

No joy descends, no whispers warm as wine,

No murmurs of love's happy discontent.

Already elsewhere, Chromis, it is light,

And Day no friend is of unhappy loves.

Too soon the woods shall waken. Thou shalt
hear,

While yet thou sailest seaward, winding horns,

Affrighted cries, shrill laughter, and the noise

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Of red-mouth'd hounds; but I, with flying feet
And heavy heart must follow where She leads,
Nor ever hope to hear thy voice again."

But Chromis dream'd above her. "With the
night

Thy feet shall lead thee hither, where I'll wait
With strainèd gaze thy gleaming through the
dusk.

The frightened birds, while yet thou art afar,
Shall sing: 'She comes.' The winds shall bear
to me

Thy hair's rare fragrance; and, when overhead
The unimpassion'd moon on this sweet bower
Looks mildly down, thy sighs shall mix with
mine

And naught shall be remember'd but our love."
And then they kiss'd; and she forgot a while,
As lovers may, the envy of the gods
And Fate's fell purpose; and the ruthlessness
That makes men eager for the end, and night.

AND one still dawn, when from the self-
same bower

Rhodanthe slipp'd to seek the other maids
Before Diana call'd them; while the woods
So silent were she heard her heart's quick beat

RHODANTHE

Whene'er she stopp'd, half-fearful, at her feet
There fell a grey, wild pigeon, wounded sore
And near to death. And wond'ring who would
slay

So soft a thing, she stoop'd and lifted it
From where it lay upon the dew-cool grass.
"Poor bird," she said, "thy mate now waits
for thee

Within her wind-rock'd nest; but all alone
The risen moon shall find her. Through the
dusk

Her eyes shall peer, but thou shalt never hear
That low, sad cry of hers, nor shall she learn
Why never thou repliest." Then against
Her bosom once she held it, where it gasp'd,
And suddenly was still. Then looking up,
With eyes that match'd the sorrow of her
mouth,

She saw the shepherd Cos awaiting her,
And started back. Upon his matted hair
Strange weeds were heap'd in semblance of a
crown,

And flame disturb'd the peace of his mild eyes
And made their gaze appalling. Slowly then,
With arms upraised and brows of inward storm,
He moved upon her. "Merope!" he cried,
"Lost star of heaven! In dream last night it
seem'd

IDYLLS OF GREECE

I heard Orion thunder thou wert dead
And lost to us forever." And the nymph
Had drawn away, dismay'd and terrified.
"I know her not," she whisper'd. "I am she
Whose face once pleased thee; thou hast soon
forgot
Rhodanthe! Let me pass thee." But the
youth
Laugh'd mirthlessly, advancing. "Thou," he
cried,
"That Pleiad art for which the heavens have
cast
Their nets of silver on impassion'd nights,
Yet ever vainly. Years I search for thee.
From Proserpine's grey gardens, thick with
griefs,
I have flown upward to the whirling stars
And sought thee on bright highways; I have
sail'd
Wide, restless seas; have stagger'd under them
With all their heavy hate upon my back
And menaced by more awful things than ghosts.
And ever crying 'Merope!' I braved
The crack'd abysms of the Caucasus
Where Harpies hide by daylight. But of thee
No trace I gather'd. Yet—" (and now he
press'd
His heart, and gazed about him) "yet it seems

RHODANTHE

That long ago, while yet the stars were young
And we could hear their singing, thou and I
Were met amid such leafery as this."

But now Rhodanthe stopp'd, and cried to him,
Grown fearful of his madness: "Cos! dear Cos!
Thou art an idle shepherd. In the woods
Thy sheep will wander if thou hastest not
To lead them to the uplands. I am she
Who teased thee once—Rhodanthe. See my
hair!

It gleams to-day as when I danced for thee
And left thee longing for forbidden things."
But Cos had frown'd at her the while she spoke.
"This morning's star acclaim'd me Sisypus,
Thy lord and master. On my head I wear
My kingly crown, and hid in yonder bush
My sceptre lies. O risen orb of Day!
Scorner of weak mortality, of things
Transient as summer's gladness and the dreams
That light the thick'ning gloom of petty man,
Behold the beauty of my Merope;
Burn through the blue of heaven so wide a track
That she and I this night may mount by it
To that high station where her sisters wait
And mourn these many æons. See!" he cried,
His eyes ablaze with madness, and his arms
Uplifted like sear'd branches to the blue,
"The sun arises from his couch of pearl

IDYLLS OF GREECE

To tell the world that Merope is here
And the swart face of Night shall gleam at last
As with a new-found glory. Fill, O Winds,
Titanic trumpets from your swollen cheeks
And blow the tale to where the outer spheres
Shiver with cold. Bright Merope is here!
And thou, Orion, from thy gleaming belt
Pluck the bright gems whose flashes dazzle us,
And hold them for my darling. She shall sit
Splendid among bright splendors; she shall be
Crown'd by the stars to which men's eyes have
turn'd

In wonder and in yearning since they loved.”
And now Rhodanthe cried to him again:
“O Cos, dear Cos, I pray thee let me go.
The first, faint sunshine means but woe to me;
For long ere this the nymphs were all astir
About Diana. She will call for me,
And who shall answer? Oh! I see them now
Like bees about a flower. O Cos, dear Cos,
I still can mingle with them if thine eyes
Will only gleam less fiercely, and thy heart
Will pity poor Rhodanthe.” But the youth
Glared at her body's whiteness. “At thy feet
The asphodels of death, and o'er thy head
The morning's gold, O Merope!” he cried.
Then looking up to where the stars had gleam'd,
But now was empty, he upraised his hands

RHODANTHE

And cried again: "Await us, ye whose eyes
Behold enormous Night's magnificence,
The dream-drugg'd earth, the black, mysterious
sea,

Of dawn expectant. Loose your trumpeters,
The burly Winds, and bid them shout through
space

That with the sun's down-going there shall
gleam

So bright a thing that gods, with wond'ring
eyes,

Shall clamor on Olympus. Bid the moon
Prepare to grow in glory, like the flower
Love's kiss has made voluptuous, lest her light
Be dimm'd by that of new-found Merope
Whom I restore to heaven." Then to the
nymph

Who, while he raved, had stood with clasped
hands

And listen'd fearfully, the shepherd turn'd,
Advancing slowly. And, with backward steps
Retreating ever, from his grasp she shrank
Until she sensed a menace at her heel,
And, looking back, scream'd once, and then to
earth

Fell, as though lifeless as the bird she held.
For far below she saw the treacherous sea,
Its constant motion undiscernible

IDYLLS OF GREECE

From her chill height, a foot of pleasant soil
Between her footsteps and the dread abyss
Unscaled of aught save sea-gulls. Even now
She heard the rhythmic beating of their wings,
Their shrilly-piping young, and far below
The dull, hoarse murmur of the rock-spent
waves

Like ghostly thunder, low but terrible.
And now Cos stood above her. "Hear," he
cried,

"Aurora's song of morning. O'er his lute
Apollo bends dejected when she plays,
And rosy Zephyrs wander down the skies
And cry her coming. In her chariot
She comes from out the crimson of the East
To wake the world. Arise, O Merope,
And greet Aurora lest she turn from thee
When thou art seated by Alcyone,
Beneath whose eyes she passes." To her feet
Then raised he tenderly the trembling girl,
But kept his arm about her. "Let me go,
O gentle Cos," she pleaded. "I will pray
By day and night the gods to cherish thee,
To lighten thine affliction, and at last
Pour from their vials such peace upon thy heart
That thou shalt bless Rhodanthe." And again
Her eyes beheld the still and frightful sea,
The sheer descent, and then the wild, wan face

RHODANTHE

Of him beside her, turn'd expectantly
Upon the sky above them. From his mouth
No sound now issued, but in dumb commune
With things unseen his lips would sometimes
move

And then be fix'd; and then would move again
And stay half-parted. In her ears the boom
Of broken waves still sounded, and the whir
Of unseen wings and thin, unlovely cries—
Suggesting ghosts and Acheron's bleak shores.
And then he seem'd her presence to forget
And held her hand but lightly, gazing still
On dawn's illusive, short-lived mystery
With lenient eyes. But while Rhodanthe
schemed

How best to coax him let her go her way
And brave Diana's anger, questioning
If sudden flight would help her, in his eyes
The flames leap'd up. Then clasping her white
form

He stumbled seaward; and while yet she saw
The woods, Diana, Chromis, and the joy
Of her few years go by as in a flash,
The air received them—and her dream was
done.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

AND all that morn beside his humble hut
Sat Chromis, dreaming. "She shall come
with me

This very night," he murmur'd. "In the dusk,
When the hush'd woods compose themselves to
sleep,

And inky bats patrol the shadow'd aisles
With noiseless wings, my love shall come with
me

And share the golden welcome of the sands.
And should she whisper of the vengeful nymphs
Or pitiless Diana, on her mouth

My lips shall press forgetfulness, my hand
Shall gently stroke the trouble from her brows,
My love shall comfort her." And then he gazed
Upon the endless waters, swinging now
With mighty movement outward, scintillant
And joyous-hearted. On the foam-capp'd
waves

The gulls rode lightly, piping drearily
Their harsh lament, well knowing that the deep
Is ever treacherous and never kind.

But Chromis laugh'd. "Thy hands are white,"
he cried,

"O happy Sea! The gods are fond of thee
When thus thou raisest them to where they sit
And curve their lips above thy joyousness.
Beneath thy breast the ocean beauties lie

RHODANTHE

On weedy couches rooted in the sands
Or coral clusters; in the eyes of them
Strange mem'ries linger, and their arms allure
Imperill'd sailors to a death so sweet
It leaves them smiling. But more fair than they
Is she whose ivory shoulder bears the bow
Of slender Dian; for her eyes are soft
With hope and longing. When I gaze in them
I seem no more a simple fisherman,
But one whose gifts are boundless, heir to stars.
O happy Sea! when thou behold'st my love,
My white Rhodanthe, thou shalt sing of her
Such splendid hymns that stars shall envy thee;
And we will praise thee while the dawn grows
red

And when the holy stillness of the dusk
Hints to our hearts our own evanishing."
Then laughing softly as one laughs who dreams,
He rose and soon was busied with his nets,
Here knotting and there mending; noting well
If all the floats were perfect. While he work'd
His eyes were ever drawn to where the woods
Lay greenly still along the milky cliffs;
And once it seem'd faint echoes came to him
Of long-blown horns, and then despairing cries,
Suggesting death. And when the sounds had
ceased,

And once again the murmur of the sea

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Told Chromis of his duty, he was glad
And bent above his slowly-drying nets,
And laugh'd again. For man has ever been
The victim of illusion. In the air
He sees bright visions, and his heart is fed
On hopes that are less tangible than mist.
The sea is wiser in its hopelessness;
The woods, in resignation; man alone—
A bubble blown from out the lips of Life
For bitter Death to shatter—man alone
Expects the meagre mercy of To-day,
The favor of To-morrow. But of this
What reck's a tann'd and love-sick fisherman
When greybeards are no wiser? O'er his nets
He bent and sang, such songs as ye may hear
If wand'ring by the melancholy sea
On fragrant nights ye listen, songs that tell
Of mermen's wooings and the vain pursuit
Of wave-borne beauty, pale beneath its green.
And then he sang an olden lullabye,
A simple thing of cradles and of stars
And mothers' arms, and of a drooping head
Whose lids were poppy-weighted. Thus the
Hours
Crept by unnoticed till the blessèd Eve,
The regal Night's fore-runner, breathed on him
And still'd his song. For suddenly the dusk
Fell all around him, soft, compassionate,

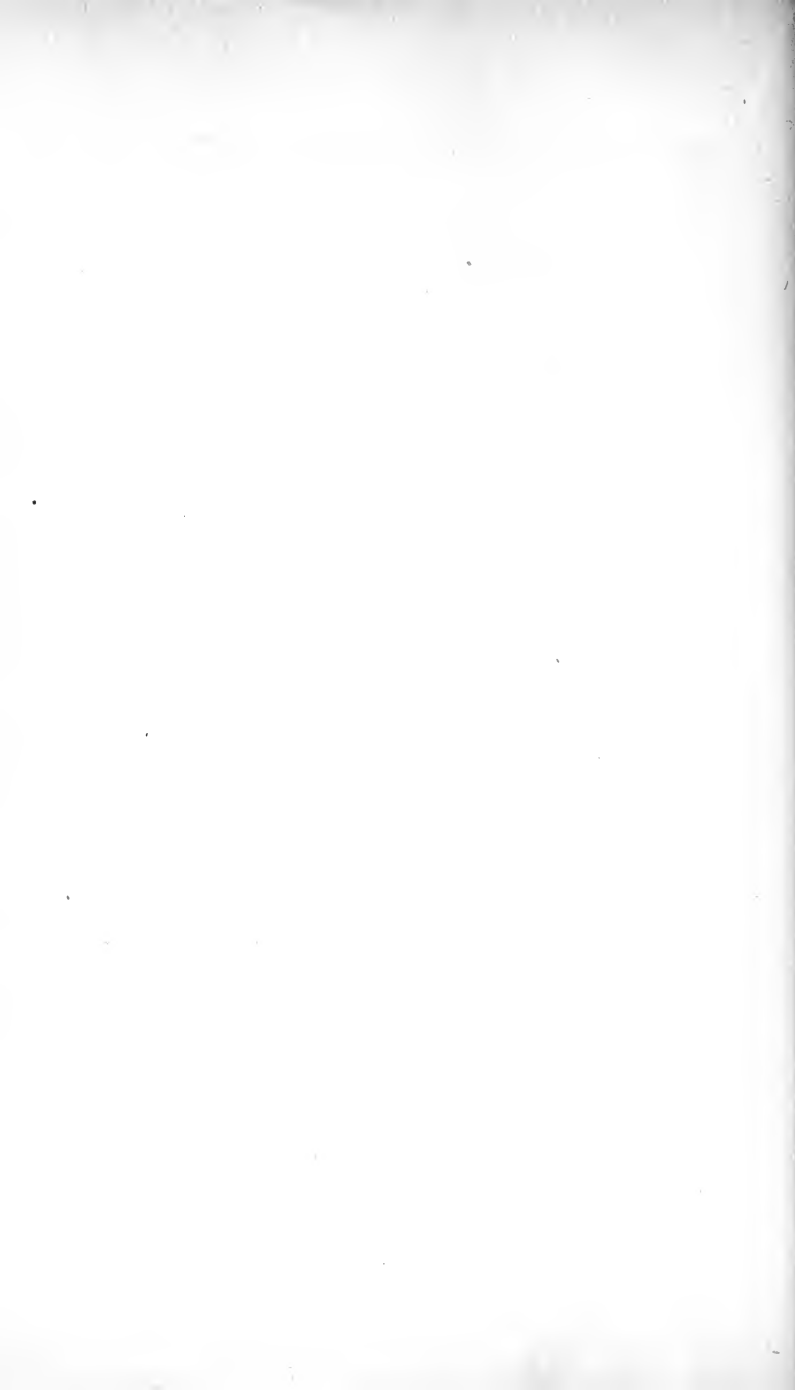
RHODANTHE

Sollicitous and loving. And he rose
And sought his hut, where early he had strewn
Soft rushes, newly gather'd; on his couch
He threw strange skins, long treasured, silken
stuffs

Cast on his back by bearded sailor men
Who loved his beauty; at the door he placed
A lighted lamp—and all to welcome her,
To welcome his Rhodanthe. And the while
He bound his leather sandals to his feet,
And dream'd of her who soon would enter there,
The Evening drew pale mists across the sea
As if in pity. For the waves now bore
To where the tender sands awaited her
His heart's desire; and soon would lay her there
For him to find; for him to weep above
And dream of till his days had conquer'd him,
And gentle whispers from the patient earth
Bade him come home and ever be at rest.



SAPPHO AND PHAON





SAPPHO AND PHAON

WHEN Time was young and life so beautiful

That, bending earthward from their airy heights,

The scornful stars portentously look'd down

On happy men, there lived a poetess

In Mitylene, on the sea-swirl'd isle

Of fortune-favor'd Lesbos. Sister she

To those same breezes that to-day may stir

The shiv'ring olives, or the lusher leaves

Of purpling grapes on hills where Pan once piped

Forgotten airs in ears long turn'd to dust.

There lies before me such a thumb-worn coin

As men have treasured for its loveliness,

From which I learn how fair a thing she was,

Brow, nose and chin pure Greek, with heavy lids

IDYLLS OF GREECE

To veil her eyes' chaste passion. On her head
The close-coil'd hair revealing modestly
A tiny ear, and an exquisite throat
Leading to greater beauties. This was she
Whose faint few notes withstand the centuries,
While volumes are forgotten. Though no more
We speak of emperors or dynasties,
Or India's gorgeous-jewell'd pageantry,
The fame of Sappho trembles like a star
Above life's doom'd illusions and the noise
That ever ends in silence. Dust is now
The hand that moulded for our eyes to see,
And wonder at, her beauty; dust is she,
And all her passion but a memory
Along with first-won kisses. But to those
Whose lips have sigh'd a promise, and whose
 hearts
The fonder grow for life's impermanence,
She is not dead. On nights of amethyst
When eyes and souls dream starward, near to
 them
She draws from out the Stygian silences,
Old loves rememb'ring. Then the dreamers
 hear
The songs she sang while from the joyous sea
The wind came up and frolick'd in the wheat
On golden mornings. Lesbian melodies
Once piped by love-lorn shepherds, melodies

SAPPHO AND PHAON

Suggested by the laughter of a god
A nymph at twilight wooing—these she sings
To them that listen; and the voice of her
Is sad, as is the rustle of the leaves;
Is soft, as summer's comfortable rain.

BENEATH the vine-hung porches of her
home,
Upon a couch be-spread with leopard skins
Lay Sappho, musing, list'ning to the sea
Whose lazy murmur pleased her. It was dawn,
And not a wind yet ventured forth to wreak
Its will upon the waters, strangely still,
A sling's cast from her gardens. Over-head
It seem'd one saw the bosom of a dove,
Serenely grey; and yet a rosiness
Encroach'd upon its softness, heralding
The glad-eyed Day. And as when music nears
Through half-hush'd woods to dreams still dedi-
cate,
This rosiness grew brighter, till at last
A shouting glory seem'd to fill the void
'Twixt earth and sky, and then the constant
sun
Came to his own, supreme. Now Sappho rose,
And lifting slowly to the arch'd serene
White, wondrous arms, wherein no lover's head
Had yet found shelter for its weariness,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Thus hymn'd the morn's full-blown magnificence:

“Day, Day, bright Day! I would I were like thee,

For thou art everlasting. Thou dost see
Each impulse of the ever-patient world
And all its aspiration. In a glow
Thou passest through the mystery of dawn
To where new birth awaits thee. Old thou art,
Yet ever young; and thee the grey Night sees,
And loves thee for thy scorning. Heeding not
The dewy sorrow of her haunting gaze
Thou passest on with glories in thy train
That seek to win and hold thee; only She,
The troubled Night, adores thee and—abides.”
Array'd in white she stood there, white without
And white within, as though the sea's own foam,
Incarnate, pulsed in mortal loveliness
To tell the sad, strange message of the sea.
For Nature uses oft such instruments
For her interpretation, lest the songs
Of winds and waters be forever lost
Amid our harsher singing. From the soil
Ascend soft murmurs, tales of days bygone
And loves long hopeless. These the poet hears
And tells again at sundown; from the stars
Descend the faint, illusive melodies
He sings at dawnburst when the hills are wet

SAPPHO AND PHAON

And consecration's light illumines the sky.
And though still young, too well fond Sappho
knew
Whence came those earth-sweet murmurs, from
what lips
Once curved and crimson. Well, too well she
knew
How short a while we linger in the light
That soon becomes a mem'ry; well she knew
That all goes down, with laughter or with tears
To mingle with blown roses; well she knew
That e'en the stars, despite their choruses
And solemn chants and gleaming bravery,
Must sometime pale, be silent, and anon
Must disappear as though they had not been.

AND while peace trembled over her, as light
May tremble o'er the flower so delicate
That dusk alone may woo it fearlessly,
She lean'd from out the vine's embroidery,
And sigh'd, and then was silent. In her heart
Strange fancies nestled, dreams as yet half-
form'd,
First longings and desires yet unexpress'd,
Except when from her soul the Muses drew
The first sweet strains of wing'd and poignant
song.
For erst when one has suffer'd, loved and lost,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Beheld all glory dimm'd, and those bright wings
Whereon all starry splendors lie enthroned
Beat darkly in the ebon solitudes;
When dreams prove vain and hopes ridiculous,
And in our ears the laughter of the gods
Booms like portentous thunder, then perhaps
That cry may come at which the multitude
Shall gape and shout: "The Singer!" But as
yet

Her loves were mostly dream-loves. In her ears
Old men, half-dead and wholly splendor-blind,
Had shrill'd their palsied passion, tending her
Their hoarded treasures for her loveliness,
Their rubies for her laughter; at her side
Pale youths had stray'd when purple hyacinths
Breathed on the air a scent so odorous
That madness seized them, and in stammer'd
speech

They told their love; and others, graver-eyed,
But still desirous of a maid so fair,
Had sought to win her. But on each and all—
On men of purpose, as on wild-hair'd boys
And trembling dotards—Sappho turn'd an eye
Of equal favor, blue and passionless
As April's sky. Alcæus, it is true,
Was ever with her. But she loved him not,
Or only loved his song; while he, 't was said,
To-day loved her, to-morrow Cyane,

SAPPHO AND PHAON

Or Polyphonta of the hopeless smile
And large, unhappy eyes. For love comes
easily

To one to whom all maids are beautiful
And worth at least the effort of a song.
And so while Sappho listen'd to his vows,
Or shook her head when dusk and fragrances
Upon the poet work'd their witchery
And roused the older longings of the man,
Her thoughts were elsewhere, e'en as now they
were

With that which still was wanting. And again
She sigh'd—whose loves, with Helen's, were to be
Eternity's one wonder—and again
The vine-leaves trembled while she cried through
them:

“The silence lays its charm upon my soul;
And things of shadow, things impermanent,
Are shadow things no longer. In the skies
Mysterious processions form and greet,
O Day, thy bright enthronement; and the air
Is quick as with the movements of the gods,
Imperious and splendid. Change nor Time
Can lay on them an unremitted toll,
Nor make them mock the flaming face of Hope
Or follow in the footsteps of Despair.
They suffer not who burn not with desire;
Who wing beneath the azure vault of heaven

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Their flight superb. 'T is we, star-enviers,
Dreamers of dreams no god may understand,
Whose little lives in their unhappy loves
Fly like a wind-borne fragrance, that decline
By ways of wreck'd ambition, steady griefs,
Into the night that gave us to the day.
I would I were not Sappho!" And her eyes
Search'd the blue heaven's eterne serenity
In wistful question. But no answer came,
As none e'er comes from skies and from the sea
Or aught that notes the wistfulness of man
Since first he wonder'd. And the while she
gazed,
Her favor'd slave had enter'd, in whose eyes
The dusk of Egypt brooded; one who was
As young as Sappho and as delicate,
Although her skin was tawny as the sands,
And Egypt's huge, unfathom'd mystery
Had made her joyless. On the silky rugs
Her arch'd foot stepp'd so lightly that no sound
Told Sappho of her presence; and the slave
Was close beside her ere she slowly turn'd,
With yet that look of question in her eyes,
That mouth of sorrow. And the slave was wise
Beyond her years. "O Sappho, thou art pale,"
She said, and laid cool fingers to her cheek;
"The sunshine riots in thy golden hair
And bids thee hymn Apollo. But thy lips

SAPPHO AND PHAON

Are those of one who nevermore may sing
Save Autumn's dirges, or of hopeless winds
That roam wide wastes of melancholy sea.
Why art thou pale, O Sappho?" Then on her
The poetess smiled wanly. "Pale am I
Because all beauty pales before a sky
Of dawn enamor'd. Naught can rival it
Save the sweet flower that modestly looks up,
Unconscious of the dewy crown it wears,
To ask a blessing and delight the gods
With the mere sight of its tranquillity.
And yet I seem so very old to-day."
(Here sigh'd she and look'd seaward, sighing
still.)

"It cannot be I wrote but yester-eve,"
She mused at last, "a few short hours ago,
That happy line about the nightingale—
I seem more fit for tragedy than song."
And then she held against her fever'd cheek
The vine's cool leaves, and drew her pretty slave
So close her lips might almost touch her ear.
"I dream'd, dear Nephys, that my brows were
bound

With asphodel," she whisper'd. "In my hand
I clasp'd a lily, white—Ah! white as death.
The meaning tell me. I am grey at heart.
The dawn is wearisome; the very sea,
Clapping its hands to make me laugh with it,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Can comfort me no more." "Who dreams of
asphodels

Shall love," the slave said. "Lilies hint of
tears.

So say those wise in dreams. Ismèniás,
Who reads the stars, may tell thee more than I,
Who fear that one great passion shall be thine
And thou shalt rue it till thy soul be weigh'd
Against the feather. Have I anger'd thee?

Thus mock us with their gifts the bitter gods,
Both thine and mine. A woman learns it soon."

But Sappho only turn'd to where the sea
Glinted and gleam'd, as though their silv'ry
spears

Ten thousand Tritons brandish'd from beneath
And pierced the flood. "Whom I shall love,"
she said,

"I'll hold to me forever. Love like mine
Is such a gorgeous jewel it shall dart
In coruscating splendor, ray by ray,
Into the very soul of him I love.

There shall not be one darksome spot in him;
But, lit by my true passion, he shall be
The faithful lantern in my firmament,
All mine, forever, as yon constant sun
Burns with the gods' hot fire and worships
them."

"So have we dream'd since men first woke in us

SAPPHO AND PHAON

The fateful passion," Nepthys cried to her.
"We are the sands; our lovers are the winds
That lift us from our deserts of despair
And swirl us starward; then they fly from
us,

As flies the wind, and in despair again
As falls the hopeless sand we fall to earth
And evermore mourn man's inconstancy."
So spoke she, slowly, as a child might say
A well-learn'd song. "O Nepthys, hast thou
loved?"

Cried Sappho, turning from the wind-stirr'd
vines,

Her hands upon her bosom. "Sad thy voice
As tender Memory's who leans to hear
The low flute's dirges, and above the soil
Breathes her lament for perish'd loveliness."
"My mother loved," the little slave replied;
"And when I drew the first sweet milk of her
I learn'd the sorrow that, or soon or late,
Each woman learns. No wonder we are sad.
But come," she cried. "A thousand violets
With yellow roseleaves mix'd till odorous
The water seems, await thee in thy bath.
And while thou bathest I will sing to thee
A love song of the desert, sweetly strange
Because most happy. It shall hearten thee
To meet thy fate, O Sappho. Asphodels

IDYLLS OF GREECE

And white-cheek'd lilies! Oh!" And then she
laugh'd,
And led her silent mistress from the porch.

THAT noon she call'd the little slave to
her,
"I still am weary of myself," she said.
"My tablets lie untouch'd. I cannot write.
There surely is some splendor in the heavens
For me to sing of; has the world grown dark
That in it now no beauty I behold,
Nor find an inspiration? In ourselves
The trouble lies, for all is beautiful
Could we but see it. All is marvellous
From sun to flower, and a perfection crowns
Each thing about us. I am growing old.
I wrote my last poor verses yesterday."
But Nepthys mock'd her. "'T was a week ago
The Muse forsook thee, and thy work was done.
So sure thou wert thou threwest in the sea,
O moody one, thy Venus-praising hymn.
Yet Mitylene now is marvelling
About thy verses to the nightingale—
I would I could repeat them." While she spoke,
Half-wistfully and slowly, on her couch
The restless Sappho, toying with a chain

SAPPHO AND PHAON

Of gleaming, brown-gold topaz, now reclined
And now was seated. "Nevermore," she
sigh'd,

"Shall I betray the Muse's confidence,
Or clothe in leaden words the fancies light
I sometimes hear in dreams. Let others sing;
My heart is over-heavy." And the slave
Laugh'd as one laughs who hears a child com-
plain

About a fancied grief. "Thou needest rest.
The sight of blood, methinks would do thee
good.

Oh! there's relief in combat." (Sappho raised
Her perfumed hands in protest) "When the
mind

Is sick or weary, let the lions slay
A mewling slave. 'T is splendid medicine
For sickly hearts." But Sappho silenced her,
Although the slave still laugh'd. "There
comes," she said,

The while she fann'd her mistress with a leaf,
"Of late a new admirer to thy door;
He says he knows thy wonder-songs by heart,
And fain would see thee. Thou enslavest all
By songs of love and hopeless nightingales."
Then Sappho question'd idly: "To my door
He comes, thou sayest?" "Yes," the slave re-
plied.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

“ Three times he came, and three times went
away

Because I mock'd him. When he said thy name
I almost pitied him and let him in

To gaze a while upon thee from afar.

For never yet has one so said thy name,

O perfect Sappho; never could the wind

So breathe a hopeless passion as when he

Whisper'd his plea to see thee. ‘Go,’ I cried;

‘Thy naked shoulders would offend her eye;

Thy hands are rough with labor. At her feet

Kneel dream-fed poets; grey philosophers,

Whose flame of life is feeble, at her side

Long for their youth. But all are wearisome

To her whose eyes behold the beautiful

In lands of dream beyond the gaze of us

Who have our being here, and are no more.’ ”

“ But Nepthys, Nepthys! ” cried the Poetess,

Now upright sitting. “ Tell me more of him.

It was not kind to send him from my door,

Him whom my song had lured there. Thou

hast said

‘His naked shoulders,’ ‘Labor-harden’d
hands,’

Was he a slave? The more should I be kind.

The poet should be rich in sympathy

And give, to them that need it, more than song;

Too oft our singing makes us passionless,

SAPPHO AND PHAON

Forgetful of our brothers that are mute."
But now the maid was busied with a bowl
Wherein bright fish with round, unwinking eyes
Gaped at the world in lazy unconcern,
Assured their food. "A free-man he; a
Greek,"

She answer'd slowly. "He is fair enough
To make a maid's heart heavy; but for thee,
Thou hast too many that are noble born
To sing thy praise to need a ferry-man,
However fair and stalwart, in thy train."
"A ferry-man?" cried Sappho. "One whose
boat

Is often idle, while he sits and dreams
Or mocks his busy fellows," Nephtys said.
"His name is Phaon, or he said it was
When I had told him you might come one eve
And bid him use those splendid arms of his
To pull us to and fro beneath the stars.
A merry rogue I judged him by his eyes;
And yet he sigh'd when 'To thy boat!' I cried:
'Command a trireme ere thou knockest here.'"
But Sappho now was musing. On the sea
Her gaze still center'd. "'Phaon'! Such a
name

Suggests a grief," she whisper'd to herself.
"The breaking of light waves upon the sands
Is Melancholy's music. Phaon is

IDYLLS OF GREECE

A flame extinguish'd by the winds at night.
Ah! what so sweet as 'Phaon,' or so sad?"
And now she eyed that little slave of hers,
Who stood before her like a thing of stone
And ever wonder'd. "Shouldst thou love," she
said,

"And lose the one thou lovest, say that name
When the sad Night enswathes thee. More
than sighs

It shall express thy sorrow. When the wind
Wanders through gloomy caverns by the sea
That name it moans, and moans it on the hills
When skies are grey and all is desolate
As the grey world beneath us. In my heart
I know not what sad memory awakes
When I say 'Phaon.' It is like the rain,
Fond Nature's pity, but it soothes me not
As is the soil soothed. 'Phaon!' Say it thou,
My night-eyed Nepthys." But the slave was
mute,

And shook her head. "He is the ferry-man,"
She said at last. "The wantons laugh with
him.

They lay cool fingers on his full-blown lips
And deck his brows with garlands. In the
night

When thou art gazing at thy sister stars,
Dreaming the love that is most beautiful

SAPPHO AND PHAON

Because a dream-love only, Phaon sits
With Cyprian Chloris in a cottage shunn'd
By all whom thou wouldst welcome—such a
house

As none dares enter in the glare of day.
'T is call'd the House of Jasmines. When I
pass

I turn my head; but ever me pursues
The fragrance of the jasmine. It is said
He thanks white Venus for his comeliness.
Performing her a service, as reward
She made him the most beautiful of men—
I wonder thou, who knowest everything,
Hast not heard this." "It is an idle tale
Spun by an idler poet in his cups,"
Said Sappho slowly. "Yet if he should come
Once more, good Nepthys, as thou lovest me
Be good to him. Who knows but words of
mine

May offset Chloris' arts; may tell to him
The white foam's message? Wind-blown, pas-
sionless,

Child of the ever passion-tortured sea
And Titan turmoil, pure it ever is;
So pure it is, dear Nepthys. In the night
It makes me think of pale Eurydice
Moving so silently, so hopelessly
Beside the Styx's waters; but at dawn,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

When through the air bright gods flash scorn-
fully,
The foam reminds me of true poetry—
Lost ere we grasp it. I must sing thereof.
My tablets, Nephtys. Hasten! Bring them
here.”
Then mused the slave. “I thought—” But
ere she spoke
Her thought of Sappho’s inconsistency,
The knock was heard upon the outer door
And, eager-eyed, she sped—to let him in.

AND soon he stood before her, bronzed,
erect,
And conscious only of the one he saw,
His equal in sheer beauty. Well she knew—
And who in Mitylene knew it not?—
The tale that link’d the fellow with the one
Whose wanton loveliness made moths of men;
Whose eyes were lodestones till she cast them
off
And fed new lovers to her passion’s flame.
And while she lay at ease upon her couch,
And watch’d him idly, yet expectantly,
She wish’d she knew the tale those lips could
tell;
And, wishing, was half-conquer’d. So she
spoke,

SAPPHO AND PHAON

And sweet that low voice sounded in his ears
Who kneel'd to hear it. "Who art thou?"
she ask'd;

"And what has drawn thee from the singing sea
To my abode? Here I abide with dreams
And half-heard voices. Though I sleep or wake
I hear soft whispers, see pale presences
Of other eyes unseen. For thee it is
No place to kneel in; thou no poet art,
No sick philosopher who aims to mend
The sorry world he lives in. In thy hair
The sun has nestled, and thy lips are those
Of one who loves this life, but sings it not,
Nor argues much about it. Who art thou?"
And he, still kneeling, lower'd now his eyes
To where stray petals strewn upon the floor
Hinted the wind's wild passion. "I am he,"
He said at last, "of whom but ill report
Has reach'd to ears so delicate as thine.
Phaon am I, the boatman. When I stood
Without thy gate, thy slave upbraided me
With 'Sappho is not Chloris. Get thee gone
Where she awaits thee. Sappho and the stars
Tremble in heights where thou canst never be.'
And yet—O thou, who art love's poetess,
Whose wild, sweet song is love's interpreter,
Is passion's music, thou wilt pity me
Who, like a leprous beggar, come to thee,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Lured by the hymns that other lips than mine
Read in the market-place while, open-mouth'd,
We mute ones listen, deeming thee divine."
And Sappho smiled. "Thou pleadest well,"
she said.

"But thou and I are of the self-same clay
That perishes so soon. The boatman thou,
And I the singer; both by tolerance
Are here at all. Upon the rocking sea
Thou dreamest daily—by thine eyes I know
Thou art a dreamer. I, beneath these vines,
Sit with closed lids and think I am at sea
Or where the gods are gather'd. But the night
May take me hence, O Phaon, to the dusk,
Where they that wear mortality's fair garb
Forever brood in silence o'er the past."
But Phaon's face now flamed above her own.
"Yet still art thou divine, O Sapphire-eyed!"
His lips protested. "Thou as deathless art
As are all things of beauty. Music, flower,
The sea's imperious splendor, high-hung
cloud—

These change, but die not. Thou art part of
them,

And so shalt live forever. In the air
Each echo of thy far-resounding song
Shall ever quiver, as the lark's brave note
Forever quivers. Death may beckon thee;

SAPPHO AND PHAON

But still shall linger in the hearts of men
Thy memory, O Sappho!" While he spoke
Her eyes grew tender as the sky itself,
And in its sanctuary, vaguely stirr'd,
Her young heart flutter'd. Yet her gaze was
fix'd

Upon a snowy, slightly-swaying sail,
That gleam'd an instant, and then dropp'd from
sight

Where the flat sea seem'd suddenly to end.
And though she was not quite aware of it,
Gazing beyond the thing she seem'd to see,
How oft in greyer years that snowy sail
Remember'd was—that golden afternoon.
How oft it seem'd, when the bright day was
done

And Memory stole forth with the chaste moon,
Itself a pale regret—how oft it seem'd
She heard that voice above her, passionate
And yet so sad. How oft to where the stars
Peep'd through the purple canopies of heaven
And hymn'd the Night, she raised her unkiss'd
eyes

And whisper'd: "Phaon!" Ah! the winds
could tell—

The viewless winds, so heavy with our griefs—
Would they but answer. But they tell us not
Of things so bitter as untimely death,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

So sad as misplaced love. They wander on,
With sorrow swollen, over sea and land,
And sigh forever and forever sigh,
Feeding on man's eterne unhappiness.

THEN, seeing he was silent, Sappho spoke;
And low her voice was, as the dove's voice is
In half-hush'd woods at twilight. "Thou art
one

Of whom, indeed, men tell unhappy things
Beyond my understanding. Sings the sea
No stern reproof of that—thy wickedness?
And do the stars, night's blessed comforters,
Utter no protest when thou shamest them?
Day loves thy manly beauty. Canst thou
stand

Erect amid its sunshine uncondemn'd?
The very beauty that encircles us
Should keep us clean; for we are part of it—
Of trees and flowers. Through not unkindly
eyes

They note our aspirations, our conceits,
Our struttings and our weakness. They behold
Thy beauty, Phaon; they delight in mine,
And mourn, as we mourn, broken loveliness,
The lost ideal and barter'd purity."
Then Phaon cried, now kneeling at her side,
Yet looking down: "Lest in the treach'rous sea

SAPPHO AND PHAON

I hurl my soil'd self, pity! What am I
That thou shouldst waste thy starry thoughts
on me,

So far beneath thee? Sappho! I have sinn'd
As weak men sin. But once I gazed on thee—
It was the morn our runners proved their skill
O'er Phyxio of Methymna—and I ask'd
What flower it was that thus in human form
Made Mitylene famous. One replied:

'Her name is Sappho. From the palace steps
She reads this noon her Hymn to Proserpine.

Who, then, art thou, that knowest Sappho not?'
But I was silent, for mine eyes on thee
Rested as on bright loveliness itself.

And thee I follow'd with the murm'ring crowd
Until I saw thee halo'd by the great,
The brave, the thoughtful and the beautiful,
Thine eyes turn'd skyward. White thy garments were

And pale the face above them; but thy brows
Were violet-clasp'd; and oh! thy golden hair
That fell about thee as the sunshine falls
About a thing of loveliness in stone!

I heard thee speak. Thy words were passion-
wing'd.

It seem'd I saw the hopeless Proserpine
With swirling ghosts about her, grey and cold,
Speechless and leaden-hearted. On her lips

IDYLLS OF GREECE

An awful sorrow quiver'd; from her eyes
Pale Death had blown the pity and the dream.
And when at last thy face was turn'd to earth
It seem'd that I still huddled in the hell
Thy fancy painted; when at last I breathed
The sweet, warm air again, I found thee gone,
And gaping men around me. From that day,
My past is bitter; for I dream of thee
And long for thee, O Sappho! I whose hands
Are set to oars, whose shoulders to the sun
Are ever bared; whose bread is earn'd by toil—
Take pity, Sappho!" In the wind-stirr'd
vines

A bird had settled. With its head a-slant,
It weigh'd what harm this man might wreak on
it,

And feeling safe, commenced at last to sing,
Oblivious to his presence. And the song
Roused Sappho from her dreaming. "Art
thou come

To tell me this?" she ask'd him. "It is praise
Beyond mere laurels." But he answer'd not,
Nor sought her eyes; but ever look'd away,
Full conscious of his own unworthiness
And fearful of her anger. And at last
She rose and stood beside him where he kneel'd,
And touch'd his hair. "I, too, have dream'd,"
she said,

SAPPHO AND PHAON

“ Of other things than sunsets and the loves
Of long-dead lovers. I have dream’d of one
Whose hand might lead me down the ways of
life;

Whose voice might comfort me; whose eyes
might shine

With warmer sympathy than warms the stars
That share night’s solemn silences with me.

I, too, have dream’d, O Phaon!” Then she
cried

With sudden passion: “ If thou lovest me,
And lovest truly as thine eyes declare,
Then win me, Phaon; win me! Where it will,
Love bursts in blossom. We the puppets are
Of them that watch us ever stonily,
And deem us children, as we doubtless are.

So thou art worthy of a woman’s love

A woman still would love thee, though in
chains

The galleys held thee. Go thou to thy toil.

A singer I; but I am woman still;

And though thou toilest, thou a dreamer art,

And so a King. I’ll come to thee at eve,

And we will look together on the stars

Above the silent waters. Go thou now.

The little bird has left us, fearing me

Who would not harm it, nor would harm the
hair

IDYLLS OF GREECE

I touch so gently. Leave me! Nepthys comes."



HE days sped by. Time is as pitiless
To lovers as to dotards. One and all
Hasten, with backward glances, to the
shade

Deeper than that the tree casts; there to wait
No first, faint flush of sombre-tinted skies;
But unexpectant, in grey solitude,
Hopeless as is pale heartlessness itself,
To mourn the days that once were bright, were
sweet,

As flashing swords and clashing cymbalry.
But little heed gave Sappho to grey Time,
And little heed gave Phaon. In his boat,
When dusk had closed the flowers and hush'd the
town,

They sat within the shelter of the sail,
Forgetful of the inattentive slave
Whose eyes stared seaward. Ever on and on
The soft winds bore them; and perhaps he sang
Songs long forgotten of forgotten things,
Dead loves and hopeless passions. Overhead
The stars that saw the tragedy of Troy
Travell'd their ways in utter unconcern

SAPPHO AND PHAON

Of aught beneath them; and the sea was dark
With thoughts of secret and forbidding
things—

Of future tempests when the madden'd winds
Might scream their hatred, and the bulging
clouds

Like monstrous sheep, distracted, fill all space.
But now those winds were gentle as the breath
That sometimes warm'd him when she question'd
him

To make him answer; for his voice to her
(Although she knew it not) was now as dear
As sunlight to the flower, as music is
To him most dear who soon no more shall hear.
Stories, half fact, half fancy, he had heard
From men whose feet had wander'd from the
tracks

Then known to few; strange tales and stranger
myths

Of northern people whom the cold had chill'd
And made ferocious; monsters, mighty-wing'd.
Of these he told her, as she sat at ease
And watch'd his face, until his mood would
change

And he would paint the still'd sea's majesty
E'er rosy dawn's bright hands may ruffle it.
And ever crouch'd, all-silent, in the prow
The little Nephthys, thinking of the sands

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Of that far home where softer stars beheld
The crawling caravan, the solemn palm,
And all the mute immensities in stone.

AND once it seem'd that he no more could
speak,

Although she question'd; could but gaze at her,
Grown mute in worship. In his boat they were.

Across the sea light breezes landward bore

The swirling sea-mists; but the setting sun,

Its labors ended, made these travellers—

These pure, sweet mists—as golden as itself;

And while they slowly shimmer'd to the land,

To bless the trees and ever-silent hills,

And cool the purpling grapes on sun-parch'd
vines,

They swathed the lovers in a golden sheen,

And made the boat a thing of mystery,

A place for dreams to home in. And the dream

That sometimes comes to women came to her

Who lay amid that ghostly wonderment

Above that sapphire sea. The spoken word

Was still unutter'd. But his eyes proclaim'd

What language could not, what no words might
dare

Amid such glory; and as lower dropp'd

The gleaming ball that solaces the world

She lean'd to him, yet trembled; questioning

SAPPHO AND PHAON

Within herself the while she read his eyes,
If joy like hers, brought forth in golden haze,
Could last forever, or must sometime turn,
Like mists at night, to utter joylessness.
But when he spoke, her doubts were all dispell'd,
And it seem'd dawn again. "Dear love!" he
cried,

"Pure as the sea-mist is my love of thee,
And thine is golden as its memory.
Bright Venus be my witness! Thou art she
Whose song has won me from black infamies.
Thou knowest all. But if thou pitiest
One who because of his unworthiness
Now loves thee more; and if thou, too, canst
love

One who is but the toy of Destiny,
Its easy tool, lay once thy sea-sweet hand
Upon my brow." Then from her place she
lean'd—

All white and golden in the golden mists—
To where his face, like an impassion'd star,
Paled wistfully against her. In his hair
Her fingers shelter'd, and the voice of her
Reach'd to his soul as though a wind it were,
Breathed for his spirit's solace and his peace.
"My love thou art, else were I far from thee;
And I am thine, or the bright-misted sea
Had never heard us whisper." While she spoke

IDYLLS OF GREECE

She press'd his fair face upward, reading it
With anxious eyes. "Ah! never have I loved,"
She sigh'd at last, "nor know if this be love
That seems half pain. And yet when thou art
near

Life's troubles fade, as now the near land fades
Behind the sweet compassion of the mist;
And jagged rocks that frown o'er treach'rous
sands

Are hidden lest their menace frighten us.
Thou hast not liken'd me to things that pass,
Pale flowers, doom'd stars, inconsequential
things

That have not voice nor feeling. In his songs
Alcæus ever likens me to these,
And makes his love a moan; in every rose
He sees me with'ring, and the winds intone
The death-song of poor Sappho." But her
hand

Was fast in Phaon's now—the little boat
Quite moveless on the waters. "Nay!" he
cried,

"I am no singer. On the sea I live.
I scorn both stars and roses; and the winds,
However hard they blow, dismay me not.
A flower is but a pretty thing to toss
At—" Phaon stopp'd, rememb'ring her whose
eyes

SAPPHO AND PHAON

Still gleam'd behind the jasmines—"at thy feet,"

He said at last, "where I would ever lie
Heedless of fate, while thou shouldst weave for me

Thy splendid dreams. Enswathed in Day's bright haze

Or Night's imperial purple, we must wend
Our way to death. I love thee! All around
The mists are swirling; thus in hell they swirl
Who once were joyous, but forever now
Bemoan life's misspent moments. Thee I love.
Say once thou lovest me." And while the mists
Hid them from Nepthys and what gods might stare

Unjoyously above them, to his lips
Her own were nearing. All that threaten'd her—

Grey gods and greyer future; even she,
The heavy-lidded woman of the night
Who sat behind the jasmines—was forgot
In that one moment. And with eyes half-closed
She murmur'd: "Phaon!" So the winds might sigh

On drowsy nights when the bewilder'd stars
Grieve for earth's lovers; so might sigh the sea
When Sorrow draws her sable cerements
About her mouth's compassion. Then his lips

IDYLLS OF GREECE

To hers descended; and while Nephys dream'd
Of æon-weighted Egypt, and the dust
That mock'd the splendid hopes of petty men,
The lovers vow'd their love's immunity
From change or death. Then Silence sat with
them

The while again, and ever yet again
Each read the other's eyes; or gently touch'd
Hair black or golden and all-wonderful,
Because belov'd. And Sappho question'd him
Why he, then deem'd most perfect of all men,
Should find in her perfection; but his words
Were vague, as words are ever when we seek
To tell what beauty is, or seems to us.

"I love," he said. "I cannot tell thee why.
The gods have stroked thy tresses with their
hands,

And left them brighter than the rays that dart
From sun-fed, straight Apollo; o'er thy head
Blue skies have linger'd till their loveliness
Lies lightly on thine eyes. No poet I.
I cannot thread my wonder-haunted words
To weave about thee. He whose trade it is
To sing of stars, of lovers' tragedies
And fairest things, can number thee with them,
And sing thy praises. Look thou in mine eyes
The while I tell thee in ill-chosen speech
How well I love thee. Thou art beautiful.

SAPPHO AND PHAON

Thy throat, thy hands, thy feet are wonderful;
Thy voice contains the pity of the hills,
The sea's deep sorrow and its joyousness.
Thou speakest, and the treachery of Time
Forgotten is. O Sappho! speak to me."
But still the girl was dreaming. All around
The sea rock'd idly, while the golden mists
Fell lightly here, and there as lightly rose
And moved away; for now from out the south
A breeze was puffing faintly, and ere long
Would lift the ghostly burden from the waves,
And let the gods behold these innocents,
Who loved despite the lasting enmity
'Twixt god and man; who dream'd and fear'd
 them not,
Nor even thought about them. And at last
She spoke, whose eyes had long been fix'd on his,
Whose love he had awaken'd. "Love!" she
 said,
And low her voice was as the voice of one
Who knows that love is life's sweet mystery,
And death its sallow foeman; "though my
 songs
Like dipping swallows leave me, and the speech
That slowly comes to thee to me is swift
As color'd wings upon the air of noon,
Yet must I stammer if I seek to tell
The love I bear thee. I can say 'I love;'

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Can call thee by thy fragrance-laden name,
And watch thy lashes' shadow on thy cheek.
But how I love no words can ever tell.
Above the rose the bee dreams heavily;
Above the sands, winds tremble; and the night
Presses the earth's cool beauty. Who can sing
Of silent passion? Phaon, thee I love.
To tell thee more my girl's heart knows not how,
Nor seeks to learn. Ah! hold me close to thee
And ask no questions. Love that silent is
Lasts ever longer than the love that's told.
I kiss thy lashes." "I, the mouth of thee,"
Her lover answer'd; "with thy dreams be mine
For ever mingled. When thou silent art
I'll know thou lovest, and I'll kneel by thee
Expecting naught save silence's caress,
Dropp'd from thine eyes of azure wonderment."
And now the breeze blew stronger, and the sail
Fill'd to its full and slowly landward bore
The happy-freighted bark. From where she
sat
The little slave, still singing to herself,
Beheld white Mitylene, with its walls
Sentry'd by whisp'ring lovers; with its wharves,
Where ships, like weary pigeons, lay at rest;
With gilded temples and white palaces,
Unconscious of their doom. Already now
The western skies were slowly crimsoning;

SAPPHO AND PHAON

And the still mists, their mission being done,
Crept from the sea and left it like a gem
Of wondrous color, purple, emerald,
Wine-red and partly golden. With the breeze
Came faint, sweet odors, as of flowers that
bloom

In distant gardens where pale Loveliness
Bends graciously above them; and soft hymns
Soothed the still air that erst was desolate.
And while they near'd the harbor, and the slave
Cool'd her small hand while singing, Phaon
lean'd

Once more to Sappho. "Thus our life shall be,
O ever-now Divinest! Golden be
Thy coming years; and when Death summons
thee

May I go with thee, that my love may light
Thy footsteps in that melancholy home."
But Sappho now was sad as was the hour,
And wish'd it all were yet to say again,
And all to dream of. "Thee I trust," she said.
"My love is thine; and though the silent mists
Have left me frighten'd, and the gods make
mock

Of human loves, say once thou lovest me.
Say once thou lovest me; that when To-day
Lies slain upon Time's monstrous catafalque,
And Night beholds us with great tenderness

IDYLLS OF GREECE

And much compassion, I may dream of it,
And bless it, Phaon, for its gift of thee.”
And Phaon trembled as he touch’d her cheek.
“I love thee, Sweet,” he whisper’d. And the
while
The boat crept homeward, still he cried to her:
“I love thee, love thee!” And the light was
gone
When they were come to where, with lower’d
sail,
Their boat was beach’d upon the golden sands
And Nepthys roused her mistress from her
dreams.
For still she heard him whisper, heard him cry:
“I love thee, Sappho!” And throughout all
time
Those words shall tremble outward; for our
vows
Endure beyond the frailness of the lips
That give them utt’rance, as in dreams we see
The one most loved, though Fate’s conspiracy
Deprives us of her presence and her love.

SAPPHO AND PHAON

AND when, behind the jasmines, in the
house
Where true love never enter'd, Chloris
heard

Vague rumors of this wondrous love-affair,
She laugh'd, while heaved her bosom. "When
I will

I'll breathe his name upon the twilight air,
And he shall hear and come to me," she said.
"For when I sigh the moon grows passionate,
And, scornful of the virgin sisterhood,
Whose queen she is, looks longingly to earth
And yearns for dead Endymion. Who is she,
This untaught girl, this Sappho, to compete
With me whom men have crown'd the Cyprian;
Who let me scorn them while they burn for
me

And hunger for my kisses?" And her slave
Bent low before her, fearful lest the glance
Behind that laughter kill her. "Sit," she said,
Rare ointments in the hollow of her hands,
"That I may bathe thine ivory-tinted feet
With these crush'd petals of faint hyacinths
And yellow roses. He shall come to thee
If thou but callest, for thy voice would wake
Diana's lover from his dreamless sleep.
Thy foot is bruised, O Chloris!" But as yet

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Such things unheeded were of her whose
thought

Was still of Phaon. In the chamber's floor
An onyx bath was fashion'd. To its brim
With water fill'd, this pool reflected her
Who stood beside it, show'd exquisitely
Her own perfection; show'd such raven hair
As Night might envy, and a form so fair
That Day outstretch'd his happy arms to her,
All else forgetting. "I am beautiful,"
She said at last. "The trembling nymph that
bends

Above the stilly waters in a wood
Of swaying cedars, is less white than I;
Above my brows a mystery lies coil'd;
And when I look, through half-closed eyes, at
men,

They sicken till I love them. I have heard
Much talk of Sappho and her gleaming hair;
Her eyes that never smoulder; and her songs
Of swallows and a love she never knew.

But I a woman am; I play on men.
Empress am I of passion; and the wind
Which sways the dust that breathed and found
delight

In olden æons, is less masterful
Than I who sway that dust while yet 't is
quick."

SAPPHO AND PHAON

And then she noted how the trembling slave
Was busied with her sandals. "Go!" she said,
"And seal the wicket, that no foot may tread
My purple rugs till Phaon comes again,
Of love expectant. From my sight conceal
The golden sunlight; let me hear no song,
And strew no roses on my leopard skins.
He loves me. I have charm'd him to his
soul;

So webb'd him in a net of witchery
That Hercules would falter at the task
Of freeing him. He loves me! That says all.
I lured him from the wiles of Soprian
Whose shoulders were more beautiful than mine;
Yet she, despite the magic of her smile,
Went to her death the day I beckon'd him.
Let Sappho have the plaudits of the world,
Fit praise for shallow rhymesters; women's
lips

Mean more than gold or laurels. Phaon is
Man as gods make them, simple, primitive,
My one desire; and till the chilling mists
Sober my passion and constrain my love,
I ask for naught but Phaon of the gods.
Behind the fragrance of my lattices
I'll breathe his name until he comes to me
To leave me never; then, his lips on mine,
I'll fold him in the crimson of my love

IDYLLS OF GREECE

And—Go! The wicket!" But she stood
alone

Amid the jasmine fragrance and the gloom.

AND so it happen'd. For as dreams are
born

For Fate to shatter, so this first, sweet love
That morning'd in the hush of Sappho's heart,
A place still virginal, was doom'd as is
The golden promise of impassion'd dawn.
Thus it has been since with her sister orbs
The earth was born to prove impermanence;
And Death, far sterner than the gentler Sleep,
Became Life's lord and Fate's grim arbiter.
A little while on Phaon's heart reposed
The head of Sappho, as on other hearts
Fair heads have rested; but no lips have told
A love as fond in words so delicate
That now we mourn the utter loss of them.
A little while the gods were merciful.
And Mitylene wonder'd. For by day
They walk'd together in the market-place,
And men were silent when they saw the light
Upon the lovers' faces; and at night
Behind the vines upon her portico
They sat and whisper'd, while the moonlight
kiss'd

The still'd sea's tragic face. Then no man saw

SAPPHO AND PHAON

Love's perfect flow'ring, or the mysteries
Of that rare hour when, with averted eyes
E'en Fate itself a little while is kind.
The short night through, while Time watch'd
warily

The order'd march of the resplendant stars,
Well knowing what must follow, side by side
They sat and whisper'd; and the dark about
Thrill'd as with music. In the moonlight
gleam'd

White Mitylene, but it seem'd to them
A ghostly city, where their dreams might home
But no man ever enter. Thus a while,
A little while, dear Joy abode with them,
And Sappho ask'd no more. In wonderment
Days came and went, and left such memories,
Such perfect petals of flower-like happenings,
As, fadeless on the highways of the Past,
Make dreamless Age less bitter. For at last,
Unknown to Sappho, who of Phaon's love
As sure was as a girl is ever sure,
What had to be crept in upon the dream,
The gods agreeing. Nature pays no heed,
Nor deems such matters of grave consequence
When Hybla's crest is daily to be bathed
In golden fire; while her belovèd trees
Are yet to nurture, and the holy grain
Forth from the solemn fields is yet to win.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

The hopeless passion of the gusty wind,
Sea-tragedies and star-births, cataclysms
In older constellations than our own—
These Nature heeds; our births and bitter
 deaths,
And all the little loves that fly between,
Are naught to her; ourselves but puppets are
Whose clamor vexes, but is soon forgot.
And so when Phaon, weary of a love
So pure as Sappho's, touch'd her hair no more,
(So fair the coin one cannot understand!)
Or touch'd it coldly, or sat moodily
The while she pour'd her soul out in a mist
Of musical endearment, on their seats
The gods sat stonily. Beneath the trees
That graced the palace gardens still were seen
The two I tell of; where the gods were praised,
Or in the market places; and again
All Mitylene wonder'd. For the light
Show'd Phaon moody, but reveal'd the love
Of their belovèd Sappho. Night by night
He bore her seaward; but the waters heard
No sighs or whisper'd love-words save her own.
And when at last his spirit sensed the call
Behind the jasmines, heard the cry of her
Who laugh'd the while she call'd him, sure of
 him,
His heart leap'd up, as when, on tempests fed,

SAPPHO AND PHAON

The awful flames from subterranean glooms
Leap up and out and, flaring fearfully,
Shock with red horror the repose of night.
And even then, aware how base he was,
He stopp'd his ears to that insidious call,
And strove to let the beauty of the dusk
Win him to chasteness. But a passion chill'd
Bleak as the moon is, which terrific suns
Warm not, nor waken; and his love was dead,
And soon that wicket open'd to his touch.

SWIFT-WING'D is news that brings unhappiness.

That very day a crone, a broken thing
Whom hate had aged and malice so deform'd
That none could deem her woman, hobbled up
And call'd for Sappho. She, with gold in
hand,

Bade Nephys lead her to the portico
And bring her cakes and honey, fruit and milk,
A staff to walk with; but the crone, when come,
So froze her welling kindness with an eye
Spared by the years, that Sappho shrank from
her

As from a horror. When the tale was told,
The crack'd lips mumbling over Phaon's fall
As though it were a very pleasantry,
She gave her gold and bade the bent thing go

IDYLLS OF GREECE

But never more ask alms, or aught, of her.
It was not yet high noon. Across the sky,
Bluer than rain-wash'd turquoise, fleecy clouds
Were slowly trailing, as when full-fed sheep
Wander the meadows over; on the sea
White, listless sails hung idly in the sun
Above as listless boats and fishermen.
A little while and teasing winds would drive
Their fleecy flocks the heaven's wide meadows
through;
Would lift the waves, and fill those idle sails
And make the boats leap onward. Soon would
come
The men to Mitylene, with their catch,
And, showing finny beauties, would be told
The news of Phaon. They would laugh,
perhaps,
And soon forget; or wonder what in him
Fair Sappho saw to waste her love on him.
But she, the blue-eyed, stood beside the vines
And watch'd the crone go dwindling down the
road,
For speech too heavy-hearted. It was done,
This first white hope; this first fair dream of
hers,
This golden expectation. To the gods
She raised no hands in protest, made no cry,
But ached in silence, as a woman will,

SAPPHO AND PHAON

While men uplift the anger of their arms
And curse the gods. And now the dusty road
Was rid of its bent burden; and the town
Quiver'd beneath the noon-glare. By the vines
The girl still stood when Nepthys came to her
And touch'd her shoulder. To her cheek she
laid

Brown fingers of compassion. "Dear," she
said,

(How low the voice was of that little slave!)

"Dear Mistress, Sappho! In my Egypt's
sands

Sleep many who have loved unhappily,
Yet now know peace. Thou, too, shalt know at
last

The sweet forgetfulness that makes the dead
The envy of the living. All around
Life's iridescent bubbles tempt our grasp,
But shatter when we touch them. Ah! The
dead

That sleep within my Egypt envy not
The hunger of the living. He that dreams
Escapes much care, much sorrow; far above
The petty disappointments of to-day,
To-morrow's fore-doom'd hopes, the dreamer
treads

Heights where the dawn is never night-
eclipsed."

IDYLLS OF GREECE

The while she spoke her mistress look'd away
To where the sails still gleam'd; but now she
turn'd

And fix'd such eyes of question on the slave
That Nephtys knew her thought, and answer'd
her.

“A child I am,” she said, “but very wise.
I ask my gods for nothing, save to sleep
At last in Egypt where I first awoke.

The soundless deserts taught me long ago
That all illusion is except the dream.

And thou who dreamest, in such solemn things
As stars and starry chantings, in the flowers
Whose exhalations are more sweet than sighs
From lips that hint their own inconstancy,
Must find thy loves. The earth is beautiful.
Between the heedless sky and this sweet soil
Is much to hold thy wonder. In the trees
Is peace, is inspiration; in the cloud—

That airy traveller to lands unknown—
Enough to fill thy heart with restlessness,
Thine eyes with longing. Ah! so wonderful
The world about us. Love thou loveliness,
And thou shalt yet be happy. Leave to them
Whose hollow laughter shocks the universe
And mocks the gods, the loves that flare and
fall—

The loves of men. The thin-flank'd lioness

SAPPHO AND PHAON

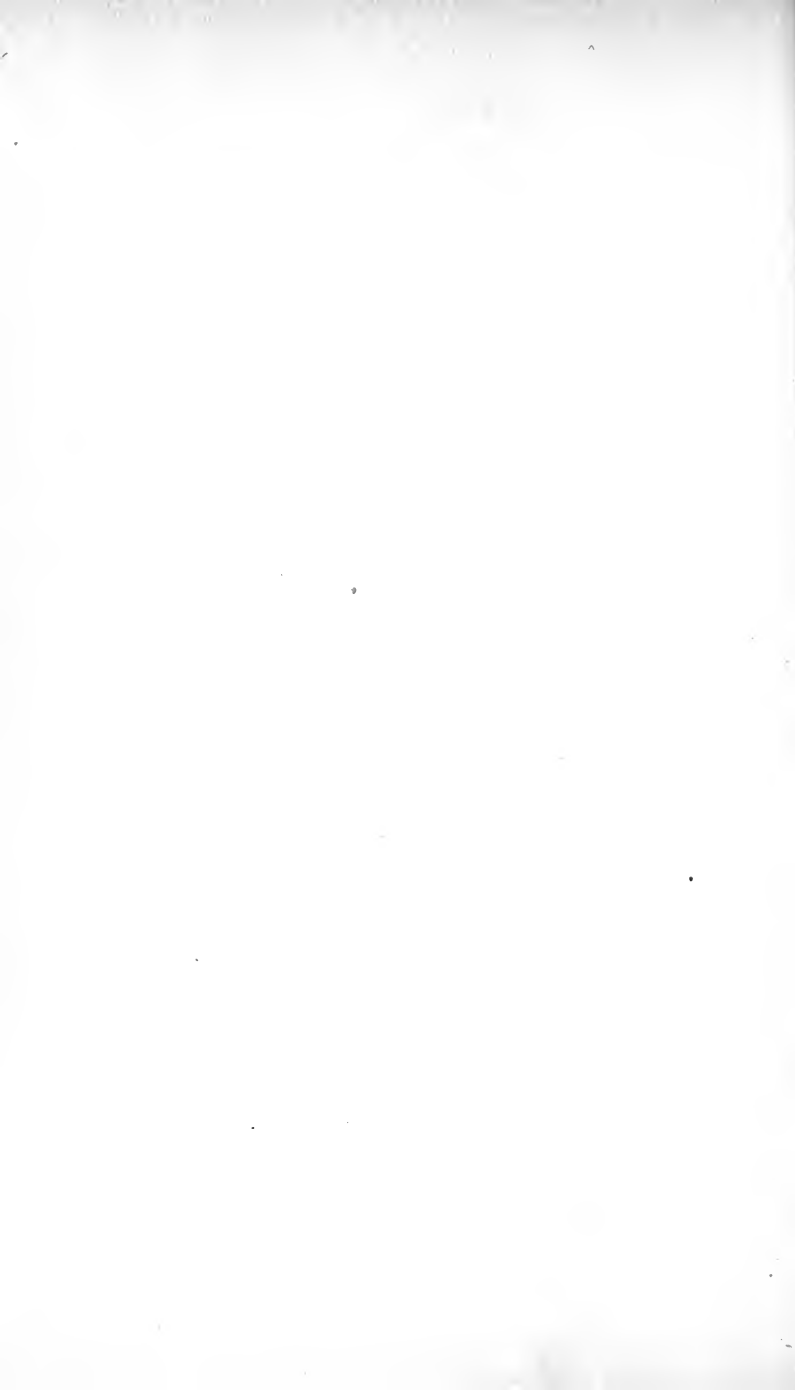
Is surer than is woman of her mate;
For he is brother to the bodiless wind,
Flies here, and there, and loves as winds may
love—

Heedless of aught so they but have their will.”
But Sappho answer'd not. Against the vines
She lean'd her cheek and, gazing on the sea,
Stood as one stands above a buried hope
With eyes that see not. What the gods decree
Must be despite our wishes. Through the
years

Each bears his burden; only Death may cut
The cord that binds us to our destiny
Of joy or sorrow. But she knew it not
Who gazed so sadly on the seas where now
The glory mock'd her; knew not that in time
The ache would pass, and other dreams would
come

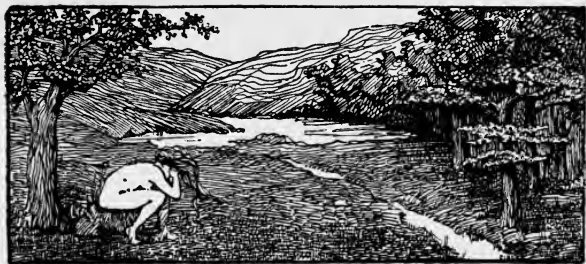
And end as dreams end. She was young; was
true;

As all that's young is true and beautiful
And very holy. And the setting sun,
When the frail boats were safely gather'd home
And splendor look'd its last upon the sea,
Still saw her standing there, all white and gold,
Longing for night, and silence, and the stars.



ŒNONE





CENONE

THE woods were waking. In the steely
light

Preceding dawn-flush, sympathetic trees
Trembled a little when the morning wind,
Itself just loosen'd from the Caves of Pearl,
Touch'd the still leaves, intoning fitfully
The advent of the splendor-follow'd Day.
The birds still silent were, save when the dove
Coo'd from a bough its thrice-repeated note
Of constant sorrow, or in airy nests
A hungry fledgling cheep'd its discontent.
The keepers of eternal mysteries,
The trees, had held their secrets through the
night,
Brooding perhaps in green solemnity
Above the ancient Mother, whence they rose
And where at last they must return again

IDYLLS OF GREECE

With all that made a noise beneath the stars,
With all that loved, with all that walk'd alone.
And now aware that from its monstrous urn
Day's glory soon would over-flood the world,
They waited with a grave expectancy
The daily wonder; but their hearts were sad—
As all is sad except unthinking men,
As all is sad that truly understands.

THERE lay beneath the gravest of these
trees

Three graceful nymphs—the pale Ocyroë,
Whose love-tale was the wonder of the woods;
Lanassa, not yet old enough to love,
And therefore happy, though she knew it not;
And Thornax of the unpersuaded eyes
And reedy laughter. At the feet of them
Wild roses cluster'd, screening them from all
That peer'd and pried at night-time; save when
came

From out its own secluded hiding-place
The amber-color'd moth, a-fluttering
Along Night's ebon aisles, or from his bough
Look'd down the still'd and wond'ring night-
ingale.

And well it was the roses shelter'd them
While Dian slumber'd, or had wander'd far
To find Endymion; for the satyrs roam'd

ŒNONE

Those woods at night, and centaurs; and the
dark

Oft startled was by anguish-noted cries
That drove the dread wolf, slinking, to his lair.
And many a nymph, whose face in Dian's train
Show'd fairer than a lily's, answer'd not
When the pale Huntress call'd her by her name
While yet the sun was rising, and the hounds
Bay'd the day's welcome and dismay'd the deer;
And many a nymph from that chaste sisterhood
Was sternly banish'd, and for evermore
Roam'd all alone the odor-breathing woods
And was as one that is accounted dead.
And now, just waken'd, on the sleeping twain
Lanassa gazed. One arm beneath her head,
Her bosom veil'd by silky loveliness
Spun from the gods' own looms, her smiling lips
Suggesting dreams as golden, Thornax lay
Beside her graver sister. Black her hair
As the soft eyes of the belovèd Night
Whose child she was, and whose unhappiness
Had long become her heavy heritage.
What dreams, Lanassa wonder'd, now were
theirs,
The one so rosy and the one so pale,
So gentle and so silent? While she gazed
One laugh'd and murmur'd—Thornax; but the
face

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Of her whose hair was dark, Ocyroë,
Grew ever sadder, as if Day had breathed
A message in the tiny ears of her,
And shock'd the soothing witchery of sleep.
Then droop'd Lanassa slowly over her,
And kiss'd her lashes. "Wake, Ocyroë!"
She whisper'd fondly, as the other stirr'd
And open'd slowly eyes of weariness
Against the eyes above her. "It is day!
Like vestals when the sacrifice is done
The morning mists have slowly pass'd away;
The woods contain them till they disappear
Like music's spirit in the cool, clean air.
The grass is silver-gleaming; but I see
As faint a blush upon the mountains' crest
As tints the brow of Venus, when, surprised
At dawn by Eros, she awakes from sleep
And smiles beneath her kisses. It is day!"
And while with calm insistence brighter grew
The skies above them, and the golden flood
Still westward rolling, left the grey skies blue,
The waken'd nymph rose slowly to her knees
And kiss'd white hands to the departed night.
"Sweet Night, farewell!" she whisper'd.
"Come thou soon
Behind the sober mystery of dusk
And bring to me, whose heart so heavy is,
Thy quietude and thy delicious rest.

ŒNONE

Sweet Night, farewell!" Then turn'd she to
the one

Whose eager face had sadden'd, kneeling there
So close beside her. "In my dreams I see,"
Said she, "thy face, Lanassa. Be not sad
Because I love the mirror-holding Night
And not the Day. Upon that magic disc
Our loves are pictured. All that cannot be
Thereon enacted is; and, fancy-fed,
Sad hearts that else would sicken, else would
cease

Their unconsider'd beating, grow most strong."
Unknown to them, while yet Ocyroë
Was speaking thus, and fair Lanassa loosed
Her heavy hair, the third nymph, Thornax,
woke

And, saying nothing, listen'd; and when turn'd
The sadder one to shake her tenderly
And bid her greet the morning, lo! her eyes
Were bright with mischief. "I have heard,"
she said,

"Thy pretty story. When I sleep I dream
Of others than Lanassa. There is one
That walks with Paris when he tends his sheep,
Whose eyes are joyous. I have follow'd him
From tree to tree and berried bush to bush,
All fearful lest he see me. Once he sang
A song as wistful as a lover's is

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Who knows that on his darling ever glare
The lidless eyes of agate-hearted Time.
Of him I dream while thou, Ocyroë,
Dreamest of sweet Lanassa." Then she
laugh'd,

Until it seem'd a thousand birds awoke
And sang the morning and the joy of it,
Until the woods re-echo'd. In the east
The sun so high was now that one by one,
The trees received their blessing at its hands
And every dell grew golden. In the grass
The nymphs still lay, until the deer's low call
Should tell them they might venture to the pool
And bathe unseen. And now Lanassa spoke:

"I think that Paris would Ænone wed
Were she but kind," she said. "One droning
noon

I saw them standing where the wind-wreck'd oak
Bridges the stream that fills our favor'd pool.
And long they whisper'd. He impassion'd was.
He seem'd more king than shepherd, and the
skin

That hid his gleaming shoulders from the sun
Was worn as though a royal robe it were.
So close I crept, my pale Ocyroë,
I almost heard him woo her; but I know
That what he said was very beautiful
Because Ænone's face was poppy-red,

ŒNONE

Although she would not answer. In my mind
I heard him beg what Pan once begg'd of me—
That I would kiss that horrid mouth of his
And twine my fingers in his musty beard;
But though the lips that ask'd so small a thing
Were very tempting, yet she turn'd from him
And fled the while he call'd her. In my heart
I pitied Paris." But Ocyroë
Now pale was as the lily, whose retreat
In deepest dells is, where by night and day
It droops above its sorrow. From the nymphs
She turn'd her face, and they, still fashioning
Their silky tresses to their own content,
Were thinking of Œnone. "With the stars,"
Said Thornax, laughing, "she has held much
speech.

She reads the future. If thou pleasest her
She promises a husband; anger her,
And thou art doom'd to press alone the fern
Until the leaves in pity cover thee.
Let Paris wed her. She will summon us
To bind their brows with garlands, sing to her,
And dance, perhaps, until our hair blows free,
While satyrs breathe on joyous-noted pipes
Airs as illusive as the thing we love."
And then she sigh'd. For Sorrow is the name
Of Joy's own shadow; and the gods know well
That sighs must follow laughter. In the woods

IDYLLS OF GREECE

These truths are known, as on the moody seas,
And where hot stars magnificently flame
Amid their colder sisters. Only we,
Puff'd specks of passion and inconsequence
On winds as unsubstantial—only we
Who enter into being with a cry
And crying leave it, deem us masterful
And curbless in our grasp for happiness.

AND while of him whose steps had never
led

To where she waited, Thornax ever dream'd,
Lanassa turn'd to where Ocyroë
Was kneeling, silent. "Should Ænone wed,
Thy hands must weave the marriage wreaths,"
she said.

"These many years her solemn eyes seek thine
Whene'er we meet; she loves thy gentleness,
Thy pale, pure beauty. Thornax lovely is.
But Thornax is the morning's; thou and night
Belov'd are of Ænone. Should she wed
Thy voice must lead the golden marriage song
And chant the prayer to Venus; thou alone
Canst deck her bed with violet and fern."
But Thornax now had risen. "Come!" she
said.

"I heard just then the deer's call. Let us
haste

ŒNONE

To where the pool lies gleaming. Thou shalt
see,

Demure Lanassa, how such pearls adorn
My body's whiteness when I plunge therein
And rise again to tease thee. Then I'll haste
To those same hills where Paris with his sheep
Wanders each morn in moody discontent;
But if my heart's desire, the gentle youth
Of whom I dream while thou, Ocyroë,
Dreamest of us, if he be otherwheres
I'll pray the gods to scatter wide the flock
And keep him from Œnone." And before
The others knew it, she had slipp'd away;
And soon that silv'ry laugh of hers was heard
Faint grown and then far fainter, down the
woods,

As free from care as is the light-wing'd lark's
Above contented meadows. Then again
Lanassa turn'd to pale Ocyroë
And touch'd her shoulder. "Thou hast said no
word

To still," she said, "my prattle. Thornax
sighs,

And laughs as quickly. Thou as silent art
As the dear trees around us. Art thou sad
Because Œnone would fair Paris wed?"
And even then the nymph no answer made,
But laid her fingers on the other's head

IDYLLS OF GREECE

And press'd it slowly backward, till the eyes
So brown and innocent look'd back in hers.
And then she spoke. "The air is warm," she
said;

"And Thornax waits our coming. In thine
eyes

I see but happy trust and wonderment;

Thy lips are curved in childhood's pure de-
light;

Thy brow serene is. As thou growest old
With these our leafy sisters, be thy lot
As happy and as care-free as is theirs.

Their peace be thine. But question not again
Why I am sad." Then lower'd she her hand
And led the way beneath wide-reaching oaks
And gracious cedars till they saw the pool
Where Thornax now was bathing. "In my
heart

I think thou lovest him," Lanassa said,
And fain had tarried. But Ocyroë,
Her arms upraised to where the brooding gods
Sit and decree how loves shall ever end,
Ran swiftly forward past the startled deer
And left the little nymph still questioning.

ŒNONE

CUNNUMBER'D bees were humming o'er
the fields

When Paris turn'd his footsteps to the
woods,

His tasks forgetting. He had left his sheep
With that same youth, whom Thornax from
afar

Still watch'd with eyes of longing; sad at heart,
And thinking of Œnone, to himself

He breathed her name, nor noted at his feet

The forest's hued and yielding carpetry,

Nor aught about him. This was Priam's son,

And heir to Troy's huge tragedy. Ere birth

A child of menace to his father's house,

That father doom'd his innocence to death;

But he who should have put him to the sword

To Ida's slopes convey'd him, where at last

Rough shepherds found him and had made him
theirs,

Saving what else had perish'd. Thus the gods

Whose wills are adamant, whose hearts are
hard,

Prepared to use him as an instrument

To fill grey hell and ruin half a world.

But now he was still young, still innocent,

A youth whom oft a wayward nymph had loved,

And found unpractised in the arts of love

IDYLLS OF GREECE

And constant to C  none. Naught he knew
Of all the horror that must follow him
In later years, when Helen's treachery
Had drawn its bloody destiny to Troy;
And naught he knew of how C  none, too,
Would sometime pay the price of constancy
To one so doom'd as he; would seek him out
In other silences and other glooms
To prove what love is when one loves so well.

PAST hoary oaks and pines whose fragrances
Are sweeter than the odors of the East,
Unmindful even of the choruses
Of happy birds above him, on he went
To where he knew the nymph awaited him,
A leafy place where oft the night had heard
Impassion'd pleas and whisper'd promises,
And utter'd dreams. For she, of all the maids
Whose beauty glimmer'd in the woods at dusk,
The fairest was, and much he worshipp'd her
And much she loved. And so, when her retreat
At last confronted him, and on her couch,
Sweet grasses weaving for a coronal,
He saw her seated, to his lips there came
Mad words of longing. "Never now may Sleep
Draw his soft plumes across my weary eyes,
C  none, sweet C  none!" Thus he cried

ŒNONE

While slow her eyes were raised to welcome
him.

“My heart a-flame is, and I cannot rest
By night or day; I would that I were dead
That Death’s grey hands might cool my fever’d
heart.”

And then Œnone teased him. “See!” she
said;

“This crown I weave to place upon the brows
Of white Diana when she asks of me
Which way the surly boar went, or the deer
With splendid antlers press’d against his neck
And eyes of brown affright. If thou wilt smile
I’ll place it on thy curl-enamor’d head
And wake Apollo’s envy. If thou wilt
I’ll crown myself, and thou shalt worship me
And kiss my pulses. See! My tawny hair
Is almost golden when I deck it thus.”

And then she crown’d herself, and laugh’d at
him

Whose eyes unhappy were. “Why standest
thou

Thus mute?” she question’d. “In the night
there came

A satyr here who sang sweet songs to me
Of hush’d retreats in other woods than these,
And bade me seek them. He has promised me
Tall ferns and matchless grottoes, crystal pools

IDYLLS OF GREECE

By winds unruffled, comfortable swards
Circled by oaks and brooding cypresses.
There meets at dawn the forest sisterhood
To hymn the day; and there at night comes Pan
Untutor'd Pan, whose airs so wondrous are
That coldest nymphs adore him. But at noon,
When the bright air is warm and tremulous,
And naught is stirring, all deserted are
Those em'rald stretches, and the gods gaze down
And find delight in their serenity."

But Paris now was seated at her side.

"Be kind!" he cried. "I care for naught
but thee.

Thy talk is of the forest, of green swards
And shaggy satyrs; whisper once 'I love'
That I may hearten'd be, may lift my lips
To thine for comfort ere I pale and die."
And still Ænone teased him. "In thy lips
The crimson tells me thou art far from
death;"

She said, and eyed him closely. "On my cheek
Thy hand is warm; thy heart is riotous;
The odor of thy hair is very sweet.
And shouldst thou come to-morrow to this place
And find me gone, the rising moon would hear
Thy vows of constancy to one more fair,
More kind than is Ænone. While he sang,
The satyr eyed me with such wistfulness

ŒNONE

That, had he beckon'd, I—" But Paris now
Was red with anger. " Could I follow him
To where he hides," he said, " this very noon
His cries should teach thee that thy Paris is
Thy lover, cold Œnone." Then again
His anger left him. " That I love," he cried,
" Thou knowest well; and that my passion is
Enduring as is Time. When nevermore
I breathe thy name amid the silences
Of blessed night, or when the glory warms
The void above us, from my lips no more
Shall whispers issue; when no more I see
Thy fancied form beside me, to the light
And earth's fresh beauty shall these eyes be
closed.

Œnone! Love me! Perish'd loveliness
Is everywhere about us. From the woods
White nymphs have vanish'd; from the hills
have pass'd
Unnumber'd shepherds; and the loves of them,
Their whispers and their murmurs and their
dreams

Are futile as the sighs of yesterday.
A little while, Œnone, thou and I
May walk, as did those others, 'neath the skies
And talk of stars, companionable trees,
Of clouds and windy music; but ere long,
With all that loved before us, we must go

IDYLLS OF GREECE

And leave the trees, the stars, the clouds behind
For others to delight in. I am thine!
I love thee! Let the mystery of dusk
Behold thee mine, behold thee in these arms
For ever shelter'd; that when come the stars
To guide the pensive moon along her way
To where her lover waits her, they may see
True love still heedless is of death and time."

HOW still the woods that morning! Deep
in fern
The deer reclined, while, heedless of the sun,
The noiseless rabbits watch'd them; from the
boughs
No song descended, for the birds were mute
In this one hour when everything was still
Save the clear brook, whose babbling was of
fields,
Sad willows and the majesty of hills.
The trees were moveless. Rich in memories
Of windy dawns and tempest-frenzied nights,
When angry lightnings split in twain the dark
And sear'd the rocks, they waited now, at peace,
Knowing the winds would quicken them again.
So still the woods! When worn and comfort-
less,
Or weary of To-day's unloveliness
And hollow men, seek thou the blessèd trees,

ŒNONE

Our gentler sisters. Thou shalt see old Pan
A nymph pursuing; thou shalt hear him play
Faint airs of days far fairer than our own,
Illusive airs that wander down the wind
Like fragrance of blown roses. O'er thy head
Shall fall the evanescent glories that were thine
In days of youth, and peace shall come to thee
And make thee envied of life's emperors.

AND now Œnone laid upon his hair
White hands of comfort, but her eyes were
sad

Despite the happy curving of her lips.
"I love thee, Paris," almost whisper'd she,
Though no one else could hear her. "In the
dawn

I oft have watch'd thee following thy sheep
To stilly uplands where Aurora casts
Her gleaming greeting as the stars go down.
And oft I wish'd that I were with thee there,
To share thy dreams and such a destiny
As blesses men that ask not over-much.
But more I know than thou, to whom the
stars

Convey no message, in whose ears the wind
No promise whispers. I have read thy fate,
And mine, sweet Paris." But the youth was
fond.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

“To-day we love,” he answer’d. “Let the
 gods

To-morrow send me bitterness or woe,
This hour has made me equal unto them;
Thy lips have bless’d me. Having won thy
 love.

Naught else is in their giving; holding it,
I scorn their anger though they send me death.
Within these forests I would ever dwell
With thee, Ænone. Of ambitious men
The gods take note; their lightnings search for
 kings,

But overlook the shepherd.” “Thou,” she
 said,

“Art kingly, Paris.” But he silenced her
And said again he loved her, telling her
Of days to be, of sunsets and of dawns
And stilly nights of moonlight and of peace.
And then she kiss’d him. “For thy dreams,”
 she said,

“I love thee, Paris. Many years I dream
With trees and flowers and the contented things
That love the sunlight. It is all that counts.
Dream, then, and love me. While thou may’st,
 be true—

Nay! lay not thus thy fingers on my lips;
For more I know than I would weight thee with,
My own heart being heavy—and be kind

ŒNONE

Until the gods shall draw thee otherwheres
And leave me grieving." Now the woods were
still,

Save when the bee droned softly in its flight
From flower to flower, unmindful of this pair
Whose dream was golden as the air itself;
And then there peer'd from out the bushes'
shade

Brown eyes upon them; but the stately doe
Saw nothing harmful, and so browsed a while
And pass'd away beneath as stately trees
To other dells as stilly. And at last,
Her perfect face still pale above his heart
And list'ning to its music, Paris spoke
That heart's own passion. "I am thine," he
cried.

"Forever and forever. Read again
This night thy stars, when on thine eyes no
more

My fond lips linger. All is passing here.
Thy loveliness, my passion, both are doom'd
As are the leaves that tremble o'er our heads
When sighs the wind above them. Yesterday
Awaits the shrunken spectre of To-day,
And both shall mock To-morrow. All goes
down

To utter silence; and the hopes of men
Are vain as is their boasting. Love me, then,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

And make my love more perfect. To the hills
The dawn shall lead me. Thou shalt hear me
pipe,

My sheep around me, such illusive airs
As lure pale nymphs from shadowy retreats
To brave the sunlight; but the gentler dusk
Shall turn my footsteps homeward, unto thee,
My sweet CEnone." It was bravely said;
For youth, with careless laughter, wind-blown
hair

And eyes whose eagerness is not yet dimm'd,
Heeds not the gods. It holds within its hands
Its gift of joy, its tall and flame-crown'd
torch,

And runs its race regardless of their frowns
Or distant thunder. Change concerns it not;
Dread Death is but a fancy when it loves.

And this CEnone knew; for she was wise
As trees are wise, whose pretty leaves prepare
Earth's solemn couch for the eternal sleep
Awaiting trees and lovers. On her lips
The smile still trembled, but her eyes were sad
As erst they were. "Day hastens to its close,"
She said at last, and kiss'd again his hair.

"A little while and from its lonely nest
The dove, the forest's hopeless melodist,
Shall raise its sad remonstrance to the stars
And win our hearts to pity. From the trees

ŒNONE

Long shadows steal, and soon sweet Night shall
lay

Her holy hands upon us. She will bless
The nestled birds and all whose mission is
To make the fair day fairer. To thy sheep
Go thou in haste, lest an unshelter'd ewe
Should miss its lamb at dawn-burst. Then to
me

Come thou, Belovèd. See! the shadows touch
Thy feet and mine. We whisper and we dream,
Surer of time than misers of their gold,
Yet life the while is passing; in the dark
We tell our vows, and suddenly we find
Bleak age upon us. Then the dream is done,
The glory over; and the while we stand
Like wither'd sheaves on desolation's plain,
The joys we gather'd and the joys we miss'd
Haunt us like spectres. O my love, make
haste!

Afar I hear the melancholy horn
That calls another to the boat of doom
And the unsated Boatman. There at last
We both must go, and the dear things of day
Shall greet our eyes no longer. Therefore
haste

To where thy sheep are calling. Dawn must
find

Thine arm about me, and mine eyes so glad

IDYLLS OF GREECE

That, should the gods destroy us, e'en in hell
Their light may comfort thee and, comforting,
Forever and forever keep thee mine."

BUT they that sit in judgment over all
Disturb'd them not, nor even noticed
them

For many years. With birds and gentle things
Whose sister is the forest, they were one,
And one with nymphs and lighter-hearted fauns
And speedy centaurs, swift as were the winds.
On morns of palest gold and lavender,
The grass still dew-drench'd, from their shelt'-
ring trees

They spied the virgin Huntress and her maids
Flashing with all the noiselessness of light
From dell to dell; or, when the day was done,
The long chase ended, with less eager feet
And careless laughter homeward o'er the hills
By twos and threes returning. One by one
Ænone named them, mark'd this wondrous hair,
That alabaster bosom, or a brow
Imperiously perfect, chastely pale.
But Paris gazed serenely at the face
Beside his own, contented; hers he deem'd
Far fairer than the fairest of the nymphs

ŒNONE

Untouch'd as yet by Love's enflaming dart
Or humanizing kisses. To the streams
She led him in the dawn-hush, where they saw
The slant-eyed satyrs bathing, riotous
As children in the water; through the woods
To where the fields encroach'd upon the wilds
They slipp'd at even and, themselves unseen,
Watch'd the brown tiller of the browner soil
Conclude his toil, the herdsman drive his kine
To peaceful waters or their night's repose.
And night by night they sought a hidden spot
Where nymph nor satyr ventured. Mighty
trees

Enclosed a pool of such sweet restfulness
That much they loved it, and would sit them
down
And tell their dreams there. "When thou leav-
est me,"

Œnone whisper'd, "I shall come by night
To this dear spot; and thou, where'er thou art,
Shalt know that I am constant." And he
laugh'd

And stroked her tresses; but she sigh'd again,
And bade him promise to be true to her.
For them old Pan blew wistful melodies,
Or airs so joyous that they laugh'd and danced
Until the forest's silence chided them;
And then they knelt beside him, while he sang

IDYLLS OF GREECE

What once had happen'd when the trees were
 young
And gods made merry. When the tale was told
They wreathed his brows with laurel, and he
 pass'd,
Still piping to the welcome of the trees.
The Seasons came, the woods re-visiting—
Spring, with her joyous laughter; Summer then
And sober Autumn; and with sadder mien
The lagging Winter, with its brighter stars
To keep men hopeful. And the lovers dream'd
From dawn till eve regardless of the Hours,
Unmindful then, as e'en to-day they are,
Of love or death; and then they dream'd again
When Sleep, so wise and so compassionate,
So tender and so kind, because so old,
Breathed on their heavy eyelids from the dark.

BUT love so perfect never long escapes
The gods' attention. They were watch-
ful now

Of Paris and Ænone; from the heights
Of crystal silence, coldly luminous,
They look'd upon them and devised a plan
To wreck this happiness, as one may wreck
The finish'd effort of the toiling ants
Or patient spider. Paris, they decreed,
Should judge who fairest was of goddesses

ŒNONE

(Themselves too wise to solve the argument
Then stirring heaven) ; and bribed by promises
Of earth's most perfect woman for his wife,
His own forgetting, he, one gleaming morn,
Crown'd Venus queen. The greatest tragedies
Have ever small beginnings. Priam now
In distant Troy, the gods still furthering
Their fell designs, caused contests to be held
'Twixt youth and youth, his war-like sons and
all

Whose names then famous were for bravery
And man-like qualities—the prize to be
A Trojan bull, the best that paw'd the ground
Of Ida's summit or dismay'd the herds
In smiling meadows. And the slaves whose task
It was to seek it, found that Paris own'd
The lordly beast, and dragg'd it to the king
And were rewarded; but the shepherd swore
No hand should ever tame it save his own,
So arm'd himself for conquest. Naught avail'd
Œnone's tears and naught her wifely love,
And naught the thoughtless prattle of their
boy—

Their only darling. He was eager now;
And laugh'd and bade her love him till he came
With hard-won laurels. And she answer'd not;
For woman pays with tears and bitterness
For man's ambitions. But before he went

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Still eager, from her presence, from the woods
Where nevermore their whispers were to sound,
And nevermore her laughter, on his hair
She laid her hands. "The gods be good to
thee,"

She said, and kiss'd him. "I shall think of thee
When morning breaks upon my loneliness
And to the skies thy son uplifts his hands
In child-like adoration; in the dusk
I'll breathe thy name and winds shall carry it
To where thou sleepest, dreaming of my love.
A little while I still would cling to thee,
Would feel thy strong heart's beating. In the
night

When all alone I lie upon my fern
What anguish now awaits me! But of thee
My thoughts shall be, and I shall pray for thee
When saddest is my heart, and heaviest.
I kiss thee, thus. For never shall we tread
These woods together, nor be mad again
In blessèd twilights as we once were mad
With stars and fragrances, and happy things
That wot not of their own impermanence.
And yet I feel that thou shalt come to me
In death's dread hour, that I upon this brow
May place my hands before earth's heavy
weight

Lies heavily upon it, O my love.

ŒNONE

There lies thy road. Go, love, and look not
back.

My love thou art, my shepherd; go thou now
As goes the hero. I shall follow thee
With eyes that look their last upon the sun
Of all most perfect, all that is belov'd
Beneath the skies. My heart is breaking. Go!"

And he was gone. Troy beckon'd, and he went,
As men have ever gone when Fortune call'd,
The one forgetting who must stay behind.

AND now from time to time there reach'd
the woods

Faint echoes of his doings. One there was,
An idle goat-herd, whose delight it was
To woo Lanassa; while another sought
Love's favors of fair Thornax. When they met
These silly swains would tell them what they
knew,

And they in turn told pale Ocyroë,
Who told Œnone, e'en as maids to-day
Will ever gossip. Thus the woods soon heard
How Paris by his beauty conquer'd Troy
And made men wonder where a youth so fair
These many years had wander'd. Then the
news

Of how his valor proved invincible;
How Nestor, Cynus and old Priam's sons

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Had fled before him, warm'd Œnone's heart
Because she loved him and was proud of him.
But very pale was that Ocyroë
The while she heard Œnone's praise of him,
And oft she bent her head above the boy
Whose prattle naught could silence. What to
him

Were deeds of valor when the air contain'd
The dipping swallow and the butterfly,
The wayward thistle-drift and humming bee?
And soon the swains were telling of the fight
With steel-thew'd Hector who, though beaten
down,

Drove Paris, refuge seeking, to the fane
Whence incense upward curl'd to Jupiter,
And where no man might slaughter. There,
too, came

Cassandra, the far-seeing, unapprised
As yet of Troy's red ending and her own;
Who, seeing Paris, and how like he was
To anger'd Hector, ask'd him who he was
And where the years had hid him. Unto her,
Pale Death beside him, Paris told the tale
Of his upbringing; and she wept with him,
And led him forth to Priam. To his breast
The old man clasp'd him, while the weight of
years

Fell from his shoulders like a heavy robe

ŒNONE

And left him happy; and the sons came up
And call'd him brother and were glad to claim
With Paris kinship. Then all Troy rejoiced
And mighty torches made the night seem day.
But, hearing this, Œnone turn'd away
And left the teller of the tale alone.

For well she knew that Paris now must go
The ways of princes, and the woods no more
Might lure his footsteps; never now the peace
Of meadows call him. He was one with kings
And kingly aspirations. Pomp and war
Would draw him ever from the arms of her,
And gleaming Glory lure him to the heights
Whence simple love is banish'd. To her breast
She press'd her boy; and when the nymphs
would come

With gifts of fruits and berries, golden corn
And fine, firm olives, bade them look at him
And note his chubby limbs, his curling hair,
His eyes and all the loveliness of him.
But oh! the constant sorrow of her lips,
That told her heart's eternal heaviness.
And then the story of Hesione,
King Priam's sister, forced by Hercules
From home to wedlock travell'd to the woods
And thrill'd the nymphs; for Paris, it was said,
By their enamor'd, faithful messengers,
Had built a fleet of triremes; pack'd with men

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Whose very shouts would terrify the stars,
Huge-handed, iron-muscled, they had sail'd
With Paris as their leader to her aid.
And once again, Ænone, having heard
This latest fable (for it was no more),
Had wept a little, but was proud of him,
And pray'd the gods to speed him on his way.
But Thornax, who was wise beyond her years,
Said nothing when the other nymphs extoll'd
Ænone's lover. For the youth whose steps
Had follow'd Paris when he tended sheep
Was now in Troy, and, loving him, she knew
What maids might there allure him. Even now
She saw soft arms around him, heard him sigh
When whitest fingers bound his brows with
leaves

Of oak and fadeless laurel. Paris, too,
Would prove as fickle—ah! she knew it well,
That little nymph whom never herd might win.
And then one day all Troy ran here and there,
While Priam clutch'd with marble hands his
throne

And glared in silence. For the tale was told
By one who sail'd with Paris, now return'd
To where his own were calling, that his lord
Had steer'd for Sparta, where of Menelaus
Fair Helen wife was, deem'd most beautiful
Of all earth's wondrous women. Under guise,

ŒNONE

So said this man, of paying sacrifice
To bright Apollo, he had woo'd and won
The blue-eyed queen from husband and from
home,

And now was Troyward hasting. At his heels
Ten thousand ships with thrice ten thousand
men

And Greece's princes, eager for his blood,
Smote the curl'd waves asunder; they would ask
Of Priam's hands before the month was gone
The bright-hair'd prince and his adulteress
Or leave the city level with the plain
For winds to scatter with the desert's dust.
Thus raved the bearded fellow, while his eyes
Roam'd from his pallid wife and little ones
To where the far hills' green security
Loom'd indistinctly. And he fled to them
With those he loved, and was not seen again,
Nor ever heard of. And the sun went down
Upon a silent city and a king
Whose doom was written though he knew it not,
Whose children were to perish by the sword
And he to follow by that bloody end.
All this was soon imparted to the nymphs,
Who told Œnone; and the later tale
Of how one golden dawn her Paris came,
The gleaming Helen with him, to the town
That fear'd his coming; how the aged king,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Himself a victim to a thing so fair,
Had scorn'd the stern ambassadors from Greece
And brought his woe upon him. Then no more
Might shepherds slip through closely-guarded
gates,

Past horrid engines and encircling camps
To where the pale ones trembled in the woods,
Their news awaiting. But at night they stole,
Those fearsome nymphs, to where by bushes
hid

They still might peer upon the fated town
And its grim menace. And the leaping flames
That sometimes rent the horror-stricken dark
Spoke to the breathless watchers of the slain,
Whose hands no more might grasp the javelin
In Troy's defence; whose eyes outstared the
stone;

Whose dreams were over. And they crept
away—

Lanassa, Thornax and Ocyroë—
To quiet pools or thickets odorous
Where ne'er was heard the rasping engines' din
Or the lean jackals howling on the plain.

WEEEKS pass'd, and months. Upon the
gentle trees

Time lays no weighty hand; alone on men
It presses from the cradle to the grave

ŒNONE

And crushes mad ambition. From a seed
The sapling springs, and is content to grow
With still insistence through the centuries,
Itself a part of beauty; heeding not
Its fair example, we, who deem us wise,
Clamor against the silence of the stars
And die before its life is well begun.

Months pass'd and years. The meadows were
as fair

As when the sun first woo'd them; and the hills,
Aware of how their hearts for ever held
Impenetrable secrets, at the skies
As calmly stared as when no eye had seen
The first-laid stone of Troy's magnificence.

Years pass'd—and years! Pale woe and paler
Death

And pitiless Destruction o'er the town
Had grinn'd and glared, while Desolation
stalk'd

Its batter'd walls, its horror-haunted streets
And fear-fill'd palaces; but still the woods
Were greenly peaceful, and the song of birds
Was all that sometimes broke their silences.
And though the shepherds long had wander'd
thence,

Too fearful to be constant, now and then
The nymphs would learn the sorrow of the town
And tell Œnone. Much they held from her;

IDYLLS OF GREECE

For Paris now was hated of all men,
And all condemn'd him. In his palace lay
The one whose perfidy was cramming hell
With Troy's fair children; but her eyes were
cold

To all save Paris, and she watch'd them die
With unconcernèd gaze and lips as firm
As was the archer's bow that guarded her.
And though men bade him send the harlot home
That war might cease, and Troy be glad again,
Her arms were magnets, and they drew him in,
And he forgot the anger'd multitude
Upon her peerless bosom. In their hearts
Men hated her and Paris; yet so fair
This wondrous pair, these lovers of all time,
That each forgot his grievance, seeing them,
Yet cursed again when they had pass'd away.
These tales were told and somehow reach'd the
nymphs,

Now older and far sadder than of yore
When first they gather'd on the slanting hills
And laugh'd at love and lovers. But the years,
Those awful years of carnage, lessen'd not
Ænone's love for Paris. From the woods
She drew fresh courage, and her boy's clear eyes
Were stars of promise. Moments came to her
When the bright beauty that encircled her
Fill'd her with longing for the peace that is

ŒNONE

True beauty's spirit, and she cried aloud
For Paris, Paris. Yet she doubted not
That he one day would part the greenery
And, like a splendor, greet her. Though no
more

She heard the faithful, pale Ocyroë
(Long gather'd to the comfort of the soil)
Re-tell his doings, she was sure of him,
And sure that soon her eyes should see again
The form so dear. To that sweet pool she
went—

The pool that heard their whispers—night by
night,

And dream'd of him. In her accustom'd place
One silv'ry night when she was seated there,
Her love should find her; and her vows re-told,
Her lashes wet no longer, they would seek
Their sleeping boy. To-morrow! If not then—
Ah! many years her lips had form'd the word
As darkness closed about her; many years
The dawn had found her, lifting quiet eyes
To where Hope smiled upon her loneliness.

SWEET Hope, most mild and most com-
passionate,
Life's kindest of companions. From the skies
Where gleaming stars attend thee, thou dost
bend

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Earthward thy gaze, and o'er despondent men
And those who scorn the hatred of the stars
Thou lookest benediction, smilest peace.
Thy mantle trails the darkness that lies furl'd
About the awful beauty of the worlds;
But higher than the proudest of the orbs
Thy hands are lifted, and infinity
Rebounds the aspirations of thy soul.
Thus bursts the dawn above thee; thus the light
From distances unthinkable is pour'd
To fill thee with a promise, as by day
The hearts of men are fill'd with purposes
Beyond the hand's performance. From the
heights

Thou drawest thus the promise of the high,
The promise that is hinted by the hills,
And sung by surging waters; then from down
The ardent skies thou steppest to the ways
Whereon men wander aimlessly, or with
Eyes set against the goal of their desire—
The ways whereon they suffer or are glad.
Thou shatterest the darkness; at thy gaze
The lone, the lost, the broken, and the host
That bend in doubt and tremble in despair
Look up, look out to hazy distances
Of pearl and promise, to the dawns that gild
The threshold of the Future. Æons hence,
With all their idols shatter'd, soulless creeds

ŒNONE

Flung to the writhing turmoil of the winds,
And dreams long dead, men still shall follow
 thee,
And lift pale hands above the moment's stress
Whene'er they see thy flaming face, O Hope!

AND true it is that Paris, mark'd at last
For that grey place where greyer shadows
 tell

Of life's illusions; where the mists enfold
Alike pale lovers and applauded men,
Both king and shepherd, being near to death,
Forgot the gleaming Helen, and to her
Whose gentler beauty haunted him in dreams
Turn'd in his weakness and his spirit's stress.
Whom Fortune favors, Death eyes greedily;
The humble live until the shafts of Chance
Fulfill his minor purpose. On a day
When never life seem'd sweeter; when the air
Flash'd with the movement of a myriad wings
And hinted the protection of the gods,
Death stared at Paris. Then he left the world
Of spears and heroes, wounded mortally,
And sought the woods where once his sheep had
 browsed

From dawn till dusk. "The end is near," he
 sigh'd

To them that stood beside him where he lay,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Of death expectant. "I can see no more
The setting sun nor the encrimson'd skies
Above our Troy; the thunder of the stones
Against our walls is like the lap of waves
On shores of golden velvet. Bear me hence
From where I lie to her whose hands may cool
My burning forehead e'er it chills in death."
And one cried: "Master, we will bear thee
straight

To where, unconscious of the coming night
Which soon must be her portion, she awaits
Her lord's arrival. There she waits for thee
On carpets crimson as the solemn skies
Thine eyes can see no longer. Helen waits."
But Paris cried, as if in agony,
And they that served him listen'd. "Not to
her,"

Said he, "I bid ye bear me. Let her bide
Amid her tapestries and see me not,
Whose life is wasted through mad love of her.
But bear me hence, O trusted hearts of mine,
To where the woods in pity gaze on us
Doom-circled mortals. From the plain creeps
out

A straight lean path; if ye but follow it
The line shall lead ye to an ancient tree,
The forest's outpost. There I'll tell ye more.
I fain would rest a little, being weak."

ŒNONE

And then, all-tenderly, they lifted him
And laid him in the hollow of his shield,
And raised it shoulder-high; then look'd ahead
To find the matted path of long ago,
The path he well remember'd. Then at once
The four stepp'd forward, heroes all of them.
And so, unnoticed, picked their way through
death

In utter silence. Now the sun had set,
And they that warr'd were gather'd in their
tents

Or Troy's wreck'd temples, where they pray'd
the gods

For better fortune. Dogs ran here and there,
And nosed the dying. But nor dogs nor men
Beheld the bearers as they slipp'd away,
Their hearts as heavy as the thing they bore
Upon their shoulders. And they came at last
To where the oak gloom'd, and of Paris ask'd
Where they should bear him. And he spoke
again

(How faint his voice!): "Go now to where the
sun—

I know not if it shine on ye or not—

Go now to where its splendor is last seen
By lovers' eyes, as watching it descend
They sit together, hand in trembling hand.
Ye soon shall find a thickly-shelter'd pool

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Where even now a deer may take its fill
Of blessèd water. There I oft have sat
With one most dear beside me, in the days
Ere fickle Venus lured me to my doom
And this unhappy ending. Then I was
A simple shepherd; but she loved me well,
And still would love me, though all men recoil'd
From one so base as Paris. Being come
To that same pool, I bid ye lay me down
And though I sleep, there leave me." And the
men

Had fear'd for Paris. "We would stay," they
cried,

"To guard thee in the shadows. In the night
Dread Horrors lurk amid those awesome trees,
And they may harm thee. Bid us stay by thee
Until the woods grow golden in the dawn."
But Paris sigh'd, earth-weary. "Lay me down
By that still pool," he whisper'd. "Though I
sleep,

I bid ye wake me not. Then go ye back
To Troy, my heroes. When they ask for me
Say I am happy with the one I love,
And, being happy, ask no more of Fame
Or hard-eyed Glory. When ye think of me,
Behold me in CEnone's constant arms,
At peace for ever." And they bore him on
To where they sensed the sun had disappear'd,

ŒNONE

And spoke no word. For a tremendous hush
Had settled now on bushes and on trees
And all that made the forest. Through the
dark

The black bat flitted, Pluto's messenger;
And subtle fragrances like incense rose
To where the gods were planning. Soon would
rise

The pallid guardian of men's destinies
Throughout the night; and little stars would
peep

From out the heaven's enormous draperies
On Troy's dejection and the forest's calm,
And wonder, wonder, wonder. But the men
Whose backs were bow'd beneath the sagging
shield

Look'd never up. On, on and on they went,
All-silent in the silence, e'en as ghosts
That flit along the unresounding floors
Of those vast chambers in the underworld
Where no one questions, no one makes reply.
And soon they came to where in darkness
gleam'd

The pool's still surface; and they laid him
down—

Now fast asleep upon that bier-like shield,
Asleep indeed, although they knew it not—
And gazed at him in silence. One by one

IDYLLS OF GREECE

They touch'd his forehead, yet disturb'd him
not

Whose sleep was sounder than the dawn might
break;

Or tears or kisses, or the clasp of arms

Or passion's pleading waken. One by one,

With hearts still heavy and with heads still
bow'd

They crept away through the portentous woods,

And left him there, his cheek upon his hand,

His eyes tight closed; and on his moveless lips

The hint of an unfathomable smile.

***Here end the Idylls of Greece.
Written in New York, Santa
Barbara and Denver; in the
years 1900-1913.***



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